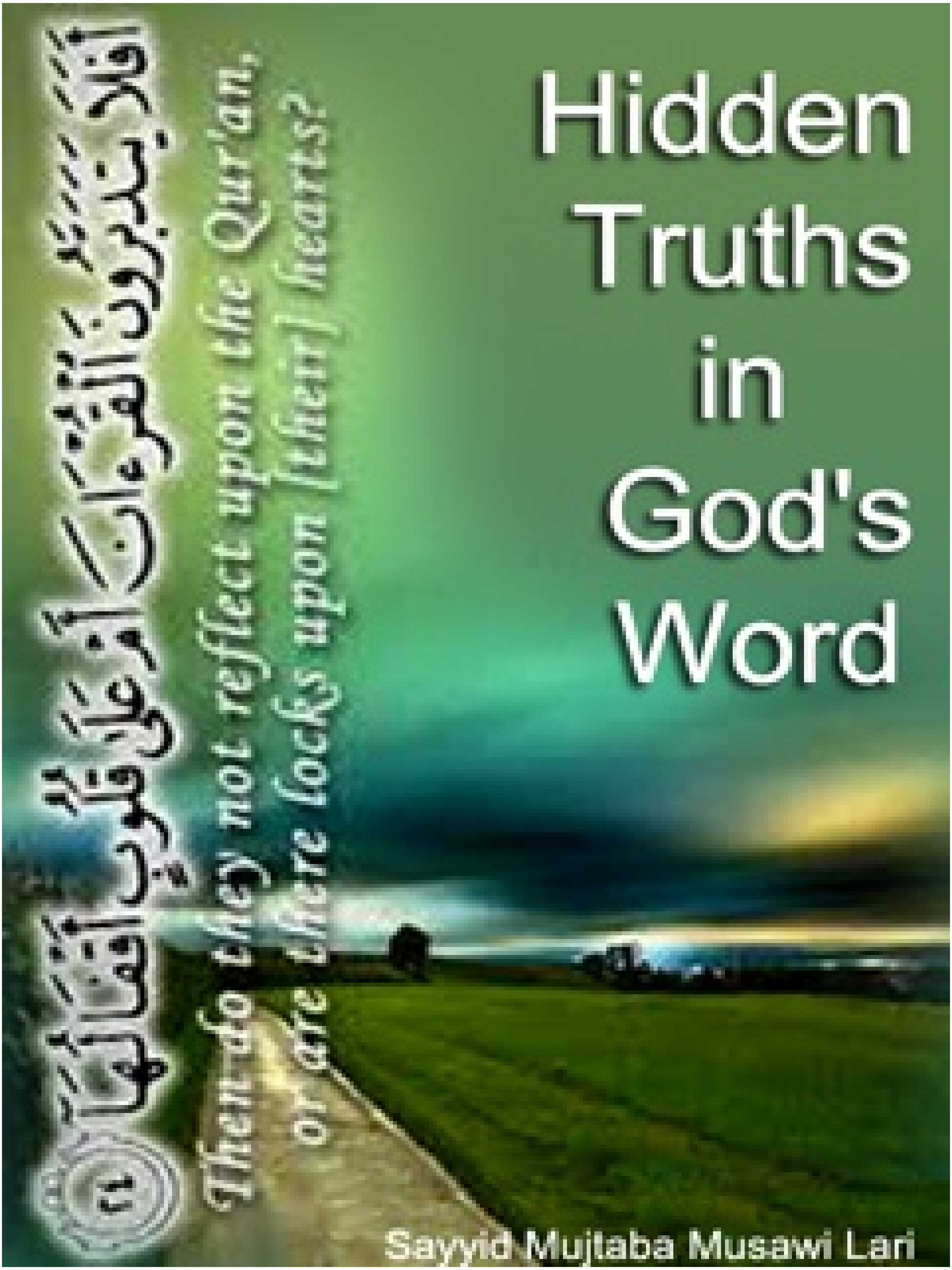


Hidden Truths in God's Word
أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا
Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon [their] hearts?
Sayyid Mujtaba Musawi Lari

بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم

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point

Some New Derivations from Qur’anic ConceptsIn this book, the author has discussed in detail some of the terms and verses of the Qur'an which he feels need to be analyzed deeply. He takes an unorthodox approach to understanding these terms .and explains the reasons for his conclusions

About the Author

Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari is the son of the late Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Asghar Lari, one of the great religious scholars and social personalities of Iran. His grandfather was the late Ayatullah Hajj Sayyid Abd ul-Husayn Lari, who fought for freedom in the Constitutional Revolution. In the course of his lengthy struggles against the tyrannical government of the time he attempted to establish an Islamic government and .succeeded in doing so for a short time in Larestan

Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari was born in ۱۳۱۴/۱۹۲۵ in the city of Lar where he completed his primary education and his preliminary Islamic studies. In ۱۳۳۲/۱۹۵۳ he departed for Qum to continue his study of the Islamic sciences studying under the professors and

teachers of the religious institution including the main authorities in jurisprudence .('(maraji

In ۱۳۴۱/۱۹۶۲, he became a collaborator of Maktab-i-Islam, a religious and scientific journal, writing a series of articles on Islamic ethics. These articles were later collected into a book published under the title Ethical and Psychological Problems. Nine editions of the Persian original of this book have been published, and it has also been

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.translated into Arabic and most recently English

In ۱۳۴۲/۱۹۶۳ he travelled to Germany for medical treatment, and returning to Iran after a stay of several months, he wrote a book called TheFace of Western Civilization. Thebook includes a comparative discussion of Western and Islamic civilization, and in it, the author seeks to prove, by way of a comprehensive, reasoned, and exact comparison, the superiority of the comprehensive and multidimensional civilization of .Islam to that of the West. This book has recently been reprinted for the seventh time

In ۱۳۴۹/۱۹۷۰ it was translated into English by a British Orientalist, F. G. Goulding and it aroused much attention in Europe. Articles concerning the book appeared in several Western periodicals and the BBC arranged an interview with the translator in which the reasons for translating the book and the reception accorded it in England were discussed. The English version of the book has up to now been printed three times in .England, five times in Iran and twice in America

About three years after the publication of the English translation, Rudolf Singler, a German university professor translated it into German and the version he produced proved influential in Germany. One of the leaders of the Social Democratic Party informed the translator in a letter that the book had left a profound impression upon him causing him to change his views of Islam and that he would recommend the book .to his friends . The German translation has now been reprinted three times

The English and German

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versions of the book were reprinted by the Ministry of Islamic Guidance for wide distribution abroad through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Islamic Students' .Associations abroad

At the same time that the first printing of the German translation was published an Indian Muslim scholar by the name of Maulana Raushan Ali translated it into Urdu for distribution in India and Pakistan. This Urdu translation has now been reprinted five .times

Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari has also written a pamphlet on tawhid (divine unity) which .was translated in England and published several times in America

In ۱۳۴۳/۱۹۶۴ he established a charitable organization in Lar with the purposes of propagating Islam, teaching Islam to rural youth and helping the needy. This organization remained active until ۱۳۴۶/۱۹۶۷. Its main accomplishments were the dispatch of students of the religious sciences to the countryside to teach Islam to children and young people; providing thousands of school children with clothing, books and writing equipment; building a number of mosques, schools, and clinics in .towns and villages; and the provision of miscellaneous services

Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari pursued his interest in Islamic ethics and writing new articles on the subject. In ۱۳۵۳/۱۹۷۴ a collection of these articles, revised and supplemented, appeared in book form under the title “The Function of Ethics in .Human Development”. This book has now been reprinted six times

In ۱۳۵۷/۱۹۷۸ he travelled to America at the invitation of an Islamic organization in that country. He then went to England and France and after returning to Iran

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began writing a series of articles on Islamic ideology for the magazine Soroush. These

articles were later collected in a four volume book on the fundamental beliefs of Islam (tawhid, divine justice, prophethood, imamate, and resurrection) under the title "The ."Foundations of Islamic Doctrine

This four volume work has been translated into Arabic, some parts of it having already been printed three times. The English translation of the first volume of this work forms the present book, the remaining volumes will also be translated and published. Urdu, Hindi and French translations are also underway; two volumes of the .French translation have already appeared

In ۱۳۵۹/۱۹۸۰, Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari established an organization in Qum called Office for the Diffusion of Islamic Culture Abroad. It dispatches free copies of his translated works to interested persons throughout the world. It has also undertaken the printing of a Quran for free distribution among Muslim individuals, institutions and .religious schools in Africa

Foreword

Speech, and the ability to communicate through conversation is one of the wonders of creation. It is through this bounty and faculty that human beings are able to form relationships with one another; whatever a person wishes to convey is effortlessly .drawn out from the recesses of his mind and shared with others through speech

Similarly, the listener is also able to use the same channel to put across his own responses and explain his thoughts and ideas to his audience. Therefore, words and phrases manifest the intent of a speaker and are the

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.means by which he communicates with his fellows

In some ways, God's speech is similar; however, understanding the intended meaning of God's words in the Qur'an – which has been the source of the biggest

transformation in the history of man – requires deep thought and reflection. This reflection should be unsullied by suggestion, adulteration and preconceived ideas because these verses have issued from an infinite source of wisdom and its sacred messages are directed towards an unassailable and firm reality, which is the God Almighty. Indeed the rays of Divine knowledge illuminate the entirety of creation.

Since God's verses are primarily addressed to mankind, its lofty and unassailable meanings have to be somewhat reduced in complexity in a manner that takes into account the limits of human intellect, ability and knowledge, so that the intricate realities that they contain may be commonly understood. Perhaps it is for this reason that God Almighty uses the term "nuzul" (descent) when He refers to His speech.

The first receptacle for the descent of revelation was the sacred heart of the last Messenger (S) and he was the only human able to withstand revelation directly from its source, and qualified to understand its content:

فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ اللّهِ مُصَدِّقاً لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

For surely he (Jibra'il) revealed it to your heart by Allah's command, verifying that which is before it and guidance and good news for the believers (al-Baqara, ٢/٩٧)

As for the rest of mankind to whom God's words are addressed, they learn the

Qur'anic verses from the Prophet (S). This is a further stage of simplification and descent so that the verses are better understood.

In the Qur'an, God Almighty has set forth concepts and realities that appeal to the differing levels of human intellect and thought, and its messages become even more radiant with the evolution of man's knowledge.

A great thinker like Mulla Sadra derives from the following Qur'anic verse, the concept of burhan al-siddiqin(١) in his thesis on hikmat al-muta'aliya (transcendent philosophy):

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِی الْآفَاقِ وَفِی أَنفُسِهِمْ حَتَّی يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ

We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth. (Fussilat, ۴۱/۵۳)

Similarly, other readers can also draw inferences from this verse about the realities of tawhid according to their individual level of understanding and intellect.

God continually urges His servants to reason and ponder over the verses of the Qur'an – which is the richest and most complete source of knowledge at the disposal of mankind – and categorically prescribes that the truth be sought through deep contemplation.

Therefore to understand the words of God scholars more than anyone else are exposed to the limitless knowledge contained in His speech. It's fascinating attraction in various dimensions draws them to benefit from it in proportion to their intellectual competencies.

Due to the vastness of its spiritual treasures, Muslim scholars in different eras have offered a variety of opinions about the contents of the Qur'an. Of course, such a great and unlimited source

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۱- Literally, "the argument of the veracious", an ontological proof for the existence of God.

cannot be imagined to be a product of information that existed at the time of revelation because it contains information about the secrets of creation and external events that was not possible for an individual to know at that time.

The Qur'an states:

أَفَلا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَی قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا

Do they not then reflect on the Qur'an? Or are there locks on their hearts?

((Muhammad, ۴۷/۲۴

The three terms, “tadabbur” (reflection), “qulub” (hearts) and “aqfal” (locks), demonstrate the special place of the Qur’an, this eternal miracle, in the lives of mankind. The verses of the Qur’an invite man to ponder deeply so that he may have access to the best policies, undo the shackles of ignorance and unawareness and illuminate the heart. They urge him to study nature to its limits so that he may explore .the frontiers of what lies beyond

The aim of the Qur’an is not to solve the diverse issues of human inquiry because these topics are out of the scope of a book of guidance. However, motivated by the Qur’an, which warmly praises the written word and the amassing of knowledge, creative and enthusiastic nations who have come to possess amazing knowledge and distinction were inspired. And great transformations that led in turn to other changes .are indebted to this very message espoused by the Qur’an

The Qur’an elevates the outlook of man to an extent that he is able to journey from the known and apparent to the shores of that which is unknown and hidden and in this

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manner begin to unravel the mysteries of creation which are of crucial importance to .mankind

The objective that the Qur’an seeks is that of the guidance and nurturing of man in all facets of his existence so that he may move towards achieving nobility. The only way man can acquire perfection is by nurturing his soul, transforming his inner self, and achieving distinctions in the different dimensions of his being by following the directives of God contained in the Qur’an. In this manner the fundamental role of the .Qur’an and the system of values it espouses becomes clear

We must take note that the invitation to ponder over its verses comes from the Qur’an itself. This sacred book, unlike ordinary books which are only concerned with information and inquiry about one subject, tackles a diverse variety of themes,

ranging from Divine gnosis, legal precepts, social and individual organisation, rights and politics, morals, manners and history, articles of worship, and scores of other matters. On the other hand, the Qur'an is an integrated unit with every part of it conforming to the rest of its principles and laws. Studying one principle can provide the key to unlocking another principle and this unique and exclusive quality highlights .the essential miraculous nature of this rich fountain of guidance

For this reason, one must not adopt a narrow-minded approach to the exegesis of the Divine revelation by imagining it to be static and inert and content oneself with the ,opinions of the scholars of former times; rather

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there must be a constant research and new exegesis as times change. Indeed, it has been reported that the great Qur'anic exegete Allama Tabataba'i has stated, "A new commentary and exegesis of the Qur'an which is commensurate with the needs of the time with regards to the Qur'an must be published at least once in every ten ".years

What is acceptable in the exegesis of the Qur'an is an expression of views derived from contemplation on its verses and intelligent interpretations based on sound reasoning; what is unacceptable is embarking on the false path of personal interpretation (tafsir bi'l ray) based on whimsical exegesis instead of sound .explanations, which will only pull mankind towards perdition

Over the years, researchers and many scholars and pious individuals have worked tirelessly to better understand the verses of the Qur'an, thereby opening avenues to reach the lofty heights of the Qur'anic wisdom. In contemporary times also, intellectuals and scientists must direct their efforts to research at various levels to uncover the realities contained in the verses of the Qur'an, and to benefit from this ultimate and concise source of principles of knowledge and wisdom, whose qualities cannot be overstated. The vast expanse of human endeavour can certainly reveal the hidden treasures of the Qur'an and extract the deeper and loftier meanings of .God's words

Indeed, the sea of God's words is boundless; the deeper we will search in this vast :ocean, the more radiant and valuable jewels will come to hand. The Qur'an sates

قُل لَّوْ كَانَ الْبَحْرُ

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مِدَادًا لِّكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّى لَنَفِدَ الْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ أَن تَنفَدَ كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّى وَلَوْ جِئْنَا بِمِثْلِهِ مَدَدًا

Say: If the sea were ink for the words of my Lord, the sea would surely be consumed before the words of my Lord are exhausted, though We were to bring the like of that ((sea) to add. (al-Kahf, ١٨/١٠٩

This work is a small step in the realization of the objectives that were discussed. However, before we embark on the main discussion, two important points must be :borne in mind

١. It is evident that the wings of human thought can never scale the heights of the lofty and esoteric mysteries of the Qur'an and that which is mentioned as "the hidden insights in God's word" are inferences that have come to the mind of the author. These views, just like the rest of the opinions and commentaries about the verses of the Qur'an cannot be stated with certainty to be the meaning intended by God; rather, every deduction made from the sacred verses, after the appropriate exposition, must be qualified by the well-known phrase, "wallahu ya'lam" (and God .(knows best

٢. By presenting a differing viewpoint from that of the exegetes about the subjects that will be discussed, it is not intended to suggest that the opinions of those great scholars are invalid. This is because, as we indicated, the intention is to study some verses from a different angle and the author is looking at the contents of the verses under review in a special manner that takes into

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account the thoughts of these scholars. In the course of establishing the validity of

these views, it will be necessary to consider respectfully the valuable opinions and .ideas of the great exegetes and to acknowledge their intellectual and special status

Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari

Qom, Shahrivar ۱۳۸۵/ August ۲۰۰۶

The Quranic View on Supplication

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمُ ادْعُونِى أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِى سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ

And your Lord says: Call upon Me, I will answer you; surely those who are too proud (for My worship shall soon enter hell abased. (al-Mu'min, ۴۰/۶۰

This verse of the Qur'an is one of those that raises some questions. In the verse God guarantees not to turn away any supplicant empty-handed and to approve every petition that His servants place before Him. However, in practice we see that although people continually ask God to answer their prayers, most of their supplications remain unfulfilled. In fact, if we compare the volume of requests that are placed before God and the limited number of individuals who have their supplications answered, it .appears that a large proportion of supplicants are unsuccessful

At this point the reactions of the supplicants takes different forms, and everyone's interpretation of the outcome will depend on his level of insight and understanding and his worldview. The one who knows well the actual concept of supplication and its consequences adopts an enlightened view about what has happened, whereas those who are pessimists and who possess gloomy dispositions view the matter in a .different light

As a result, frequently people whose supplications

have apparently not been answered, and whose outlook is superficial, become despondent and pass through the vicissitudes of life alternating between disappointment and despair. They turn their back on faith and even fall into the error

.of denying God’s omnipotence

The question that arises here is that why do the prayers of supplicants go unanswered despite God’s assurance to the contrary? Exegetes have attempted to :answer this question and in the main, have suggested two possibilities

۱. The acceptance of prayers depends on various conditions, the most important of which is inner purity from, and the absence of, the pollution of excessive sin and defiance of God’s commandments. This is because disobedience of God is the main factor in the rejection of supplications, and it deprives man from attaining God’s .abundant and endless grace and bounties

۲. God’s knowledge of what is in the best interest of an individual, which is based on wisdom, as well as His all-encompassing knowledge over all aspects of an affair, results in the acceptance of some supplications and the rejection of others. This is because God is aware of what is beneficial for an individual as well as for the entire creation, whose lives are inextricably linked with one another. An individual only views matters, knowingly or unknowingly, as they affect himself, and the wider implications and impact of his supplication do not enter his thoughts. However, God’s all-encompassing knowledge does not consider every prayer expedient for acceptance. Even at an individual level, everything that a supplicant prays for

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may not be beneficial for him, and if it is not in his ultimate best interest to have his .prayers answered, God will not do so

Although these two main explanations are plausible and correct to some extent, they are not fully satisfactory answers, and do not completely alleviate the curiosity of the questioner, especially because God has emphatically stated in the verse under review that He guarantees to answer every supplication. In fact, the wording of the verse does not mention any conditions that need to be met before the prayers of a .supplicant are answered

Furthermore, classifying the most usually asked supplications as outside the ambit of this general verse may not be consistent with the eloquence of God's words, and we must therefore seek an explanation that is robust enough and at the same time, both conforms with the verse as well as provides the questioner and the researcher with a .suitable and basic answer

When we begin to examine the verses of the Qur'an with some thoroughness, we find that the kinds of supplications that God has guaranteed to answer have a particular formulation, and by observing and following it, one can be expectant of the acceptance of his prayer. In fact, the Qur'an illustrates paradigms of supplications so that God's servants can emulate them and place their own worthy desires in front of .the Creator, with sincerity and every hope for acceptance

The supplication must be in synchrony with the human's progress towards perfection and in harmony with the

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constant movement of creation towards perfect existence; this is when the prayers .will be met with the desired response, and will be answered by God

In other words, the supplications of a servant in front of God must be consistent and compatible with the objectives of the creation of man, which are inextricably linked to his existence. That supplication that would extend the vision of a man to the boundaries of the spiritual realms is one that shapes his destiny and enables his development in every aspect that is necessary to achieve the pinnacle of spiritual distinction and elevation, so that he is aided by Divine grace to increase his status .even further

Thus a true supplication must be viewed from this perspective, whereas the majority of the prayers of mankind are completely devoid of any spiritual motivation or content and are about personal and mundane desires, or about relief from the daily hardships .which people ordinarily face in the course of their lives

As we mentioned before, according to the exegetes of the Qur'an, there are two main obstacles that impede the granting of supplications: sin and the absence of one's best interests; however, in the case of true supplications, these two factors cease to apply because they begin by asking God for forgiveness from sin and His pardon and .clemency

The plea for forgiveness is found at the heart of these prayers which the supplicants who possess spiritual and intellectual distinction constantly murmur at the threshold of their matchless Sustainer. God

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himself has instructed man that the only way to wipe out the stain of sin is to purify himself through repentance and a firm resolve not to regress and by distancing himself from the habits of the past. It is only then that God, in His infinite mercy and love, will accept the remorse of His servant, which is no more than a return to his original course in seeking understanding about His Lord, professing belief in Him and .making amends for his past misconduct

As for the supplication not being in the best interest of the supplicant, that factor no longer applies when the prayers are of a spiritual nature, because the supplicant has asked for favours that will increase his knowledge of God, and result in an elevation of his own spiritual merits and status; certainly acceptance of such a prayer will be in the interests of the supplicant, because the factors that would have made acceptance of .a supplication inappropriate do not exist in these kinds of prayers

Therefore when it comes to supplications that have a spiritual component, the two afore-mentioned impediments no longer apply, and the grounds for acceptance of .the supplication are completely prepared

The best examples of genuine supplication can be clearly found in the Qur'an, and after the necessary investigation, we can become properly familiar with them. God has quoted samples of the supplications of His Prophets and close servants which clarify the principles and aims of God for creating the mankind, viz. to achieve

His proximity. And if the supplications of the Prophets that are mentioned in the Qur’an seem to be apparently about worldly matters, they are pronounced as preludes to achieve loftier merits, and latent within them lie noble and high objectives.

Prophet Zakariyya (A) wanted a son to inherit the office of prophethood and continue the guidance of his community after him, and not for the pleasure of a father at having a son. The words of Zakariyya (A) and his whispered and heartfelt communions are too deep to pass over with just a cursory reading. The term he used for a son was, “successor” (wali), and not, “son” (walad), meaning that the fruit of his life had to be a close servant of God and his succession would result in the continuation of prophethood and the guidance of humanity.

يَرِثُنِی وَيَرِثُ مِنْ آلِ يَعْقُوبَ وَاجْعَلْهُ رَبِّ رَضِيًّا

Who should inherit me and inherit from the children of Ya‘qub, and make him, my Lord, one with whom You are well pleased. (Maryam, ۱۹/۹)

The supplication of Zakariyya (A) was granted and he was blessed with the son that he had desired, who continued to preach God’s message and guide the people till the end of his days.

Prophet Sulaiman (A) did not ask for a mighty kingdom and authority because he wanted fame, power and glory; rather, it was his noble aspiration to remedy the spiritual malaise of his people and to introduce them to sublime truths, and this was the focus of his teachings. At

no time does history show that Sulaiman (A) ever used his powers for his own ambitions or for personal gain; in fact, he placed his great power and means at the service of his people to guide them so that the banner of tawhid was kept aloft and justice prevailed on the earth. This is the supplication of Sulaiman (A) to his Lord:

رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِی أَنْ أَشْـکُرَ نِعْمَتَـکَ الَّتِی أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَیَّ وَعَلَی وَالِـدَیَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَـلَ صَالِحًـا تَرْضَـاهُ وَأَدْخِلْنِی بِرَحْمَتِـکَ فِی عِبَادِکَ الصَّالِحِینَ

My Lord! grant me that I should be grateful for Your favour which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I should do good such as You are pleased with, and include me, by Your mercy, in the ranks of Your righteous servants. (al-Naml, ۲۷/۱۹)

Next, let us also consider the supplication of Prophet Ibrahim (A):

رَبِّ اجْعَلْنِی مُقِیمَ الصَّلاَهِ وَمِن ذُرِّیَّتِی رَبَّنَا وَتَقَبَّلْ دُعَاء رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لِی وَلِوَالِدَیَّ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِینَ یَوْمَ یَقُومُ الْحِسَابُ

My Lord! make me keep up prayer and from my offspring (too), O our Lord, and accept my prayer. O our Lord! grant me protection and to my parents and to the believers on the day when the reckoning shall come to pass! (Ibrahim, ۱۴/۴۰-۴۱)

The only case mentioned in the Qur'an when the supplication of a Prophet has been denied and not accepted is that of Prophet Nuh (A) regarding the salvation of his son from the flood. This supplication stemmed purely from fatherly love, and such prayers are not guaranteed to be accepted by God (even

if they issue from an eminent Prophet).

The supplications that the angels and the bearers of God's throne invoke for the good of the believers as recounted in the Qur'an are all directed to help man achieve eternal felicity. Thus, they supplicate at God's door asking Him to accept the repentance of the believers and to envelop them in His mercy and forgiveness:

الَّذِینَ یَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُ یُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَیُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَیَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِلَّذِینَ آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ کُلَّ شَیْءٍ رَّحْمَهً وَعِلْمًا فَاغْفِرْ لِلَّذِینَ تَابُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا سَبِیلَکَ وَقِهِمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِیمِ {o}رَبَّنَا وَأَدْخِلْهُمْ جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ الَّتِی وَعَدتَّهُم وَمَن صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّیَّاتِهِمْ إِنَّکَ أَنتَ الْعَزِیزُ الْحَکِیمُ

Those who bear the throne and those who go around it celebrate the praise of their Lord and believe in Him and ask forgiveness for the believers: Our Lord! You embrace

all things in mercy and knowledge, therefore forgive those who turn (to You) and follow Your way, and save them from the punishment of the hell. Our Lord! and make them enter the gardens of perpetuity which You have promised to them and to those who do good of their fathers and their wives and their offspring, surely You are the (Mighty, the Wise. (al-Ghafir, ۴۰/۶-۷

The Qur’an also describes the supplications of the close servants (awliya) of God. As we see, these prayers have the same qualities as those of the Prophets and angels. :The following are clear examples

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىَ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِى خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذا بَاطِلاً سُبْحَانَكَ

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فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ {o}رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ مَن تُدْخِلِ النَّارَ فَقَدْ أَخْزَيْتَهُ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنصَارٍ {o}رَّبَّنَا إِنَّنَا سَمِعْنَا مُنَادِيًا يُنَادِى لِلإِيمَانِ أَنْ آمِنُواْ بِرَبِّكُمْ فَآمَنَّا رَبَّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرْ عَنَّا سَيِّئَاتِنَا وَتَوَفَّنَا مَعَ الأبْرَارِ {o}رَبَّنَا وَآتِنَا مَا وَعَدتَّنَا عَلَى رُسُلِكَ وَلاَ تُخْزِنَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَهِ إِنَّكَ لاَ تُخْلِفُ الْمِيعَادَ

Those who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: Our Lord! You have not created this in vain! Glory be to You; save us then from the chastisement of the fire. Our Lord! surely whomsoever You make enter the fire, him You have indeed brought to disgrace, and there shall be no helpers for the unjust. Our Lord! surely we have heard a caller calling to the faith, saying: Believe in your Lord, so we did believe; Our Lord! forgive us therefore our faults, and cover our evil deeds and let us die with the righteous. Our Lord! and grant us what You have promised us by Your messengers; and disgrace us not on the day of resurrection; surely You do not fail to perform the promise. (Aal-(Imran, ۳/۱۹۱-۴

If we look at the verses at the end of Suratu Baqara, we see once again that the supplications of the believers have the same elements as the prayers of the Prophets, :angels and the close servants of God

رَبَّنَا لاَ تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِن نَّسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا وَلاَ تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إِصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلاَ تُحَمِّلْنَا مَا لاَ

طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا وَاغْفِرْ لَنَا وَارْحَمْنَا أَنتَ مَوْلاَنَا فَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ

Our Lord! do not punish us if we forget or make a mistake; Our Lord! do not lay on us a burden as You did lay on those before us, Our Lord do not impose upon us that which we have not the strength to bear; and pardon us and forgive us and have mercy on us, You are our Patron, so help us against the community of unbelievers. (al-Baqara, ٢/٢٨۶)

All these supplications that the Qur'an quotes from the Prophets, the angels who pray for the believers, the close servants of God and the prayers of the believers for themselves are all about raising one's station, developing one's understanding and achieving proximity to God. For this reason, after mentioning these types of supplications in the Qur'an, God states:

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ

So their Lord accepted their prayer… (Aal-Imran, ٣/١٩۵)

It is quite clear that in no part of this collection of supplications is there a plea for personal or material gain or for the fleeting pleasures of life. In another verse, the Qur'an states:

وَيَسْتَجِيبُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَيَزِيدُهُم مِّن فَضْلِهِ

And He answers those who believe and do good deeds, and gives them more out of His grace. (al-Shura, ۴٢/٢۵)

According to some commentators, this verse restricts the fulfilment of the supplications of the believers to their worship and obedience, because that leads to their advancement, and such prayers are always accepted by God.

After the mention of the rituals of the

Haj, and exhorting the believers about the remembrance of God (dhikr), the Qur’an :states that men are of two types; some of them say

رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِی الدُّنْیَا وَمَا لَهُ فِی الآخِرَهِ مِنْ خَلاَقٍ

Our Lord! give us in the world, and they shall have nothing in the hereafter. (al-(Baqara, ۲/۲۰۰

:while others say

رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِی الدُّنْیَا حَسَنَهً وَفِی الآخِرَهِ حَسَنَهً وَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ {۵} أُولَئِکَ لَهُمْ نَصِیبٌ مِّمَّا کَسَبُواْ وَاللّهُ سَرِیعُ الْحِسَابِ

Our Lord! grant us good in this world and good in the hereafter, and save us from the chastisement of the fire. They are the ones who shall have (their) portion of what they (have earned, and Allah is swift in reckoning. (al-Baqara, ۲/۲۰۱-۲

As we see, this supplication is not for the inspiration of the soul and elevation in the level of spirituality or achieving proximity to God; it is about acquiring the goods of this world, or of this world and the next. Therefore, in the reply contained in these verses to both groups – those who desire the goods of this world only and have prayed for the same, as well as those who desire the goods of this world and the next, and have resorted to supplication to acquire these desires, which are empty of any spiritual content – God does not mention acceptance of their supplication. Instead, to attain their objectives, He has directed them to follow a general Divinely ordained system in this world; viz. to apply effort and action to achieve their aspirations on the basis

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.of the free will and freedom of choice that has been granted to mankind

In this way, He informs both groups that they will achieve their desires through exercising the appropriate efforts and actions; the Qur’an states: “They shall have ”.their portion of what they have earned

The infallible Imams (A) have also presented valuable instances of this manner of supplication, a clear example being the supplication of Kumail, as taught to him by

:Imam Ali (A). One of the phrases in this supplication states

يا ربّ قوّ على خدمتك جوارحی واشدد على العزمه جوانحی و هب لی الجد فی خشیتک و الدوام فی الاتصال بخدمتک ... و منّ علیّ بحسن اجابتک و اقلنی عثرتی و اغفر زلّتی

O Lord! Strengthen my limbs for Your service and sustain the strength of my hands to persevere in Your service and bestow upon me the earnestness to fear You and to constantly serve You… be gracious to me through Your best response and reduce for .me my sins and forgive my lapses

The supplication continues until there occurs an interesting statement that is :resonant with our present discussion

فانک قضیت على عبادک بعبادتک و امرتهم بدعائک و ضمنت لهم الاجابه

For verily, You have ordained Your worship for Your servants and commanded them .to supplicate to You and guaranteed them a response

In this part of the du'a of Kumail, Imam Ali (A) makes an allusion to the guarantee mentioned in the verse of the Qur'an that we are reviewing, mentioning God's assurance to reply to every supplicant as a consequence of

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.those supplications that are based on spiritual and noble wishes

In truth Imam Ali (A) intends to demonstrate that supplications made in the manner of the prophets, angels, close servants and believers are the type that God has guaranteed to accept and teaches us to call to God in this manner so that we may .likewise receive His reply

When we turn to the supplications contained in the Sahifa of Imam Sajjad (A) we see exceptional examples of supplications that qualify for acceptance; we find that all of them express noble and spiritual aspirations. Similarly, we should study this prayer :(taught by Imam Mahdi (AF

اللهم ارزقنا توفيق الطاعه و بعد المعصيه و صدق النيه و عرفان الحرمه و اكرمنا بالهدى و الاستقامه و سدد السننا بالصواب و الحكمه و املاء قلوبنا بالعلم و المعرفه و طهّر بطوننا من الحرام و الشبهه...

,O Lord grant us the gift of being obedient to you

,and being remote from sin

,and let us be sincere in our intention

,and give us true knowledge of that which is sacred

,and honour us with guidance and steadfastness

,and direct our tongues to that which is righteous and wise

,and fill our hearts with knowledge and comprehension

...and purify our stomachs from that which is forbidden and that which is doubtful

In the entirety of this supplication, there is no mention of any request that is restricted .to worldly desires or pleasures

The other holy Imams (A) have also left treasures of valuable supplications, containing lofty and worthy messages, all seeking God’s grace to achieve the highest .spiritual levels

Mystics and

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other scholars have emphasised that the essence of du’a (supplication) and beseeching at the threshold of God is an instinctive need, because the fundamental philosophy of supplication and the secret conversation of man with his Lord is to ultimately bring about his guidance, development and elevation even if the .supplication is about material and basic needs

Therefore, true supplication – whose reply has been assured by God for those

individuals who have purified their thinking, filled their hearts with the love of God, and have cleansed their beings from every tinge of Godlessness – is that supplication which aids and benefits the supplicant on his journey to his Lord. However, that is not to say that, God, whose treasures of mercy and bestowal are limitless, does not grant the requests of His distressed and helpless servants out of His grace and favour. It is for this reason that the holy Imams (A) have always insisted that one should ask for .every need from God and constantly supplicate to Him

Therefore, when beseeching in the correct manner from God, the manner that results in acceptance, the believers can also invoke God's grace and mercy, so that God may approve their supplications for basic and worldly needs also. However, even if they are about alleviating the troubles of this world, such prayers must not be devoid of .mention of the real needs, which are in the hereafter

If the scope of the verse, "Call on Me, I will answer you" and the assurance of acceptance is so

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wide that it includes supplications for all worldly desires and material excellences and the endless quest for ease and plenty and all that man seeks in the course of his lifetime, then we are faced with a kind of contradiction. The world is a place for the trial of mankind and in the course of their life, everybody's capacity to face difficulties is revealed. Indeed God has categorically stated that this world is the abode of tribulations, which shape the character of human beings and cause them to develop .and advance

The Prophets (A) and close servants of God went through some of the most demanding adversities in their lives, yet they expressed only love and adoration at the Divine threshold and in this way acquired proximity to their Lord and received .blessings suitable to their own great stations

If supplication is all that is required to alleviate the usual and day-to-day problems and difficulties that man faces in this world and God had also guaranteed the

acceptance of these sorts of prayers, then He would not have allowed the following order and arrangement to prevail on earth, where He states:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنسَانَ فِی کَبَدٍ

(Verily, We have created man to be in distress. (al-Balad, ۹۰/۴

Indeed, this expectation and mental concept is against Divine wisdom that on the one hand, God should create a system of trials and tribulations in order to test man, and on the other he would remove all these difficulties at their supplication. For He has stated in the Qur'an:

أَحَسِبَ

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النَّاسُ أَن یُتْرَکُوا أَن یَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لا یُفْتَنُونَ

Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, "We believe", and not be tried? (al-Ankabut, ۲۹/۲)

It must not be ignored that another portion of the disappointments and difficulties that man encounters in this world are due to his own inept and unwise actions and by granting man the gifts of intellect and reason, God wants him to try his utmost to solve his own problems and overcome the obstacles that block his path.

A point that can be inferred from the last part of the verse we have been discussing is that, if we consider "worship" as mentioned in the latter part of the verse:

إِنَّ الَّذِینَ یَسْتَکْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبادَتِی سَیَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّم داخِرِینَ

surely those who are too proud for My worship shall soon enter hell abased. (al-Mu'min, ۴۰/۶۰)

to mean supplication, it is more compatible with the beginning of the verse, where God commands man to supplicate, because this verse talks about supplication and its

acceptance, and supplication is also a part of worship. If man wants to reach an elevated level he cannot do so except through the means of the constant remembrance of God (dhikr) and supplication (du'a). On the other hand, worship is best expressed by words of praise of God and by thanks and gratitude for His bounties and by acknowledging His transcendent and exalted station.

However, supplication is an earnest expression of man's desires and expectations from God, and in reality, it is man's acknowledgement of his own

weakness and helplessness in front of God's greatness; this is where the pompous and shameful pride of arrogant individuals prevents them from supplicating and expressing their humility and abjectness in front of their Lord, and thus cutting off their relationship with Him.

If we deliberate about the character and thinking of the arrogant, we will find that in the main, they tend to praise God with empty words, and one does not see any sincerity in their prayers. These haughty individuals are not prepared to demonstrate their humbleness in front of their Creator and acknowledge their own true worthlessness.

That is why God, the Omnipotent Lord of creation, warns those caught in the trap of pride and arrogance that the same vanity that prevents them from supplicating humbly in front of Him, will ultimately lead only to their eternal loss and punishment in the fire of hell.

Let us look once again at the verse we have been discussing:

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمُ ادْعُونِی أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِینَ یَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِی سَیَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِینَ

And your Lord says: Call upon Me, I will answer you; surely those who are too proud for My worship shall soon enter hell abased. (al-Mu'min, ۴۰/۶۰)

A Look at the meaning of "Daraba" in the Quran

وَاللَّاتِی تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِی الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ

And (as to) those [women] on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and [if that does not make any difference, then] leave them alone in the sleeping-places and ([if that does not make any difference, then] strike them. (al-Nisa, ۴/۳۴

A reliable study of the Qur'an can only

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be made when the mind is freed of previously held beliefs and notions, because pre-judging and viewing its concepts without objectivity will only lead to closed-mindedness and inflexibility. This is the one danger that every discerning researcher .must avoid at all costs

One of the verses that the opponents of Islam and the proponents of women's rights have singled out in order to impugn the ordinances of Qur'an is the one mentioned above. The verse concerns the issue of the desertion (nushuz) of women. Instead of trying to objectively understand the true purport of the verse, they have resorted to strident criticism, unaware that discussions based around an incorrect presumption .leads away from the truth and obstructs thinking

In fact, through a detailed and necessary study of the word "yadribuhunna" (strike them) in the verse, one can infer two distinct meanings, which we will explain in some :detail below

The first meaning is derived by considering the apparent meaning of daraba, which is .to hit; and the majority lean towards this interpretation

The second meaning, which is consistent with a study of the context of the matter being discussed in the verse, is an alternate translation of the word daraba, which is a word with several different meanings. One can consider the possibility of this second meaning, which is indignation and disregard, as a response of the man to

the nushuz displayed by his wife. This conforms to the extensive meaning of daraba, (which includes parting and separation.(۱)

;"Another meaning of daraba is to "turn away from" or "to dispense with

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Thus, it is said, "Daraba al-dahru baynana", meaning that, "The passage of time - ۱ .(caused us to part". (al-Munjid, under the entry for daraba

therefore when referring to the speech of someone who is speaking nonsense, or to a piece of baseless writing, one may say, "fadribuhu 'ala'l jidar" (throw it at the wall), ."which is an allegory for, "do not pay attention to it

The meaning of parting and separation for daraba can also be applied to the verse under consideration, and a study of the verse can be done on this very basis, because it has been mentioned that the term darabahas been used here because it denotes a (sudden parting as opposed to a gradual one.(۱)

Therefore, it seems that here the Qur'an advises the husband who has unsuccessfully tried to censure his rebellious wife by two milder means, to finally separate (daraba) from her. However, he should avoid any harshness towards her and patiently await for his action to have an effect; he should allow her to think over matters and to takes steps towards what is best for her. Therefore, when interpreted in this manner, we can say that the verse means to say: If a woman shirks her responsibility and acts inappropriately, then the husband must attempt to remedy matters in the prescribed .stages

Initially, the man must gently counsel his wife, and remind her of her responsibilities, and encourage her to reconsider her actions which have resulted in the unhappiness .in the life they share together

However, if the efforts of the husband are to no avail, and the wife persists in her improper behaviour, he must react conservatively by only leaving the marital bed but

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For further information, refer to: Lisan al-'Arab, v. ۱, pp ۴۵۱-۴۷۷; Mu'jam Muqa'is al- -۱ Lugha, v. ۳, p ۳۹۸-۳۹۹.

remain in the house and make no overt change to the normal routine of the household. This is because the verse of the Qur'an stipulates only the act of leaving the bed at this stage and no more.

If this action also does not bring about a change in the wife's conduct, and she persists in behaving against her own interest, and the husband's efforts are all in vain, then a sterner measure is required in an attempt to break the impasse. This step requires the husband to cut off all contact with his wife within the house and lead a completely separate life. It is as if he has removed the wife from her place of focus in the household, with the intention that she herself changes her mind and alters her disagreeable behaviour to prevent a further deterioration in the situation.

It is true that in this situation the wife still lives in the house and benefits from material and other comforts, but she will not be in the spiritual and emotional state to feel at peace, and this may motivate her to acknowledge her responsibility towards the family and take the first steps to restore harmony and allow the family to advance towards a better and happier life.

However, if we take daraba here to mean "striking", and we assume that the Qur'an requires that in such circumstances, the man should compel his wife to resume her duties and responsibilities by raising his hand to her, so that she comes back to

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her senses, then acting on this interpretation will probably have an adverse effect for the reasons discussed below:

۱. The books of jurisprudence state that the slightest physical violence towards one's wife, if it bruises her skin, carries a penalty (diya) and such an act of chastisement is

not permitted for the man for any reason. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether a lighter or soft blow may have any effect in chastising a rebellious wife and causing her to alter her behaviour; in fact it is highly unlikely that such an act would resolve .anything

In cases of nushuz, the jurists are more concerned with (legislating for) the action of the man with regards to stopping the maintenance of his wife and not the matter of beating or physical chastisement. As a rule, jurists have not made a thorough examination of the issue of beating, rather they have focused on its secondary details; such as the number and frequency of blows, the circumstances under which the perpetrator is excused from having to pay the penalty or blood-money (diya), or if the woman displays her fractious behaviour continually and every day, how many times may the man resort to hitting her, and for how long such violence is permitted, etc. These questions need to be discussed in detail but even a lengthy examination .may not be able address all the issues that arise in this regard

٢. Usually physical discipline will only push a woman into a position of bitterness and animosity, especially when

she realizes that the husband has used his last resort and can do no more to stop her; .at this time she may feel there is nothing more he can direct at her

٣. Any physical action will usually result in an adverse reaction, and may drive the woman to become even more entrenched and resolute in her misbehaviour. This is especially the case especially for women who have a quarrelsome nature and who are more prone to antagonism than women of a calmer and more level-headed .temperament

Therefore, the use of punishment and force on this type of women will only harden their obstinacy, sometimes leading to a loss of control on both sides with unpredictable results. Whenever one embarks on a method of chastisement to bring about compliance and ultimately restore an affectionate relationship between the

spouses, there is always the possibility that the outcome may not be positive, or that the rift between them becomes even deeper or the chance of any mutual agreement .in the future is weakened

To compel the woman into compliance through physical violence is not an . ۴ agreeable process psychologically for both spouses and will not provide inner contentment to either one. In time it will erode their love for one another and ultimately may lead to the breakdown of the marriage. On the other hand, it seems that the previously described step of total disassociation from the wife, while she still lives within the household, may be the stimulus that causes her to review matters and

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.think about the future and persuade her to reform her behaviour

Furthermore, such a rejection by her husband is unpleasant for the wife and she .would not be able to bear or tolerate it for long

No one can deny that the final step in this series of actions, which apparently . ۵ seems irrevocable, where the wife has resolutely rejected all the efforts of her husband to restore harmonious relations, is divorce. Divorce is the last resort when .every other course of action fails

Therefore when all three steps fail to achieve the compliance of the wife, and no amount of reasoning can change her inappropriate behaviour, the husband embarks on a course of permanent separation and dissolution of the marriage by invoking divorce. When the husband is convinced that nothing will break the impasse and that the marital bond has broken down completely, he brings about relief from the stormy relationship through the agency of divorce, without the need for any physical .chastisement or action

We know that Islam has paid a special attention to the spirit and true meaning of .۶ earthly life, and the paths that lead to the its best conclusion. For this reason, it promotes a sound relationship between members of the family and recognizes that a

.strong attachment between husband and wife will result in the prosperity of a family

As a result of the great respect accorded to women in every aspect of life, the husband has not been allowed to put the least pressure on his wife to perform

household chores or to force her to do something that is against her disposition. In fact, the wife has also been given the choice to ask for payment from her husband for .breastfeeding their child

By appreciating that Islam has adopted a holistic approach to the issues relating to women, which incorporates their rights and honour in the household and in society, it is not improbable that in Islam's view, men cannot react with physical violence in the face of the rebellious behaviour of the wives because it is not compatible with the .Islamic ethos of love and harmony amongst the spouses in a family

The holy Prophet (S) has stated: I am amazed at the one who strikes his wife, while he is more deserving to be struck himself; do not strike your wives with canes, because there is a legislative retaliation (qisas) for that. Rather, chastise them with a curtailment in their maintenance; thus, you shall gain felicity in this world and the next. (۱)

Here the Prophet (S) reminds men that it is more beneficial to them to gain the attention of women by punishing them by curtailing their allowances rather than by physically striking them. This is because, on the one hand, it will discourage them from rebellious and improper conduct, and on the other, you will not be answerable in front .of God and, in the hereafter, you will have a defence for your actions

۷. Finally, if it is insisted that the meaning of daraba in this verse is indeed

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۱- Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, v. ۱۴, p. ۲۵۰, printed by Mu'asasa Al al-bayt; and Bihar al-Anwar, v. ۱۰۳, p. ۲۴۹, report ۳۸. It is noteworthy that according to the traditionists and

scholars of rijal, this narration is classified as reliable (muaththaq) or according to other reports, even authentic (sahih), (such as the tradition narrated from Abu Maryam). Therefore, other reports which have been cited against it, for example the tradition of "al-darb bi'l siwak" (striking with the wooden toothbrush) are problematic in two respects: firstly from the aspect of reliability, because it is a tradition with an incomplete chain (mursal); other than featuring in the exegesis Majma' al-Bayan, it does not appear in any original source. Secondly, many senior jurists have attempted to explain and justify this tradition and this itself suggests that they regard the usage of the term daraba to be in other than its apparent meaning. In his discussion on nikah (marriage) in his work "al-Masalik", Shahid al-Thani defines the phrase, "al-darb bi'l siwak" as: "It is intended to mean playfully, otherwise such an act is unlikely to chastise or encourage reform". The late Bahrani in his "al-Hada'iq" agrees with Shahid al-Thani that daraba here is not in the meaning of striking physically, by adding: "It is not striking with a whip or with a stick...and there must be no bodily injury as a result." (Al-Hada'iq, v. ۲۲, p. ۶۱۸). Finally, as a further emphasis, we can quote a tradition from "Al-Fiqh al-Mansub ila'l Imam al-Rida (A)", in which Imam al-Rida (A) in the course of explaining the verses, states, "It is a friendly (playful) strike...". All this shows that that the term "fadribuhunna" in the verse has not been .used in the commonly held meaning of hitting or striking

chastisement through physical means, as the apparent reading suggests, it must be stated that this is not an obligatory command, so that this step becomes incumbent on a husband whose wife exhibits nushuz or rebelliousness, and that he has no choice but to resort to physical chastisement. In fact, there are indications that suggest the use of other means, such as curtailing living expenses, by which he can deal with nushuz, and compel his wife to reform. Thus, the step suggested by the verse is instructive in that it mentions one way of rectifying the wife's behaviour and recalling .her to her responsibility

Therefore, if in times when human thought and reasoning had not yet matured, it was possible to counter the nushuz of a wife through physical discipline, albeit with special conditions, in these times when we are in a more enlightened era, a different reaction

to nushuz is needed. For this reason it is necessary to change and adapt the existing .methodology and not to ignore the needs of the age

Therefore, nowadays when women have reached a much higher level of education and maturity of thought, the process of staged separation initiated by the husband to control the rebellious behaviour of his wife is likely to succeed in convincing her to change her position. It can bring about an atmosphere which is free of strife and antagonism, which is easily achievable, and restore harmony in the relationship and family life. And this is possible by considering both possible meanings of the word daraba in God's word, as we

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.have explained

The Qur'an lends itself to a wide range of interpretation – and indeed, this is part of the miracle of this divinely inspired text. For this reason, this independent and living .entity shall endure for all time

?(What is meant by the "White Hand of Musa (A

وَأَدْخِلْ يَدَكَ فِی جَيْبِكَ تَخْرُجْ بَيْضَاء مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ فِی تِسْعِ آيَاتٍ إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ وَقَوْمِهِ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمًا فَاسِقِينَ

And enter your hand into the opening of your bosom (collar), it shall come forth white without evil; among nine signs to Fir'awn and his people, surely they are a (transgressing people. (al-Naml, ۲۷/۱۲

Amongst all the Prophets of God, Musa (A) was the one who displayed the most miracles, perhaps because the Banu Israil – the Jews – were the most perverse amongst the nations in their outlook and conduct. One can say that from the aspect of their intransigence and stubborn habit of clinging to their own ideas, they are a unique .nation in history

Due to their warped logic, they were never truly receptive to the truth, and repeatedly

demanded that their Prophets display miracles according to their individual proclivities, their idle curiosity and their baseless whims; some of them even demanded miracles that were logically impossible. They did not understand that the path of seeking conviction, searching for the truth and acquiring guidance – which is the only course for salvation – requires the heart and mind to be free of the tendency towards stubbornness. Additionally, miracles only come about through God's will and according to the necessity and circumstances

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.at the time, and not for the amusement and vagaries of an ignorant people

To complete His favour, God sent most of His Messengers to this nation, and they presented many wondrous and clear miracles to their people so that the face of Truth would not be covered by the veils of deception and corruption. However, the Jews were ungrateful for these blessings, and killed several of the Prophets of God. Despite their atrocious behaviour, God patiently presented His proofs by continually sending .Prophets to them

The greatest Prophet appointed as a messenger to this nation, was Musa (A); he was sent to a nation who, under the yoke of slavery, had lost all its virtues and excellences. In their practice, lies masqueraded as the truth, and merits were based on false criteria. Musa (A) began his mission by preaching to a limited and closed circle in an environment which was bereft of Divine values and knowledge, until he made the nascent community stronger and increased their inner realization. Like the Prophets before him, he tried to bring an end to their narrow and ossified thinking by inculcating .in them the preference for the life in the next world

The verse above mentions only one of the wondrous miracles of this Godly man and :contains several novel and elegant points, the exposition of which follows below

According to the scholars who have commented on this verse, the phrase, "white without evil" refers to the whiteness of the hand of Prophet Musa (A), which he

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presented to the people as a proof of his claim of prophethood. The use of the phrase, “without evil”, negates the notion that his hand was stricken or afflicted by any disease. In fact, the Qur’an asserts that this whiteness was distinct from a kind of known illness.

This explanation is weak in several respects:

۱. The whiteness of the hand of this Prophet of God must have resembled the whiteness of a kind of sickness (vitiligo or leukoderma) for the verse to allay the concerns of the observers and reassure them that there was no affliction present.

۲. At the time of Prophet Musa (A) magicians performed wondrous acts, and even though the deeds of the magicians and charlatans were the result of their limited human abilities and were based only on sleight-of-hand, training and practice, they nevertheless had a great effect on the minds of the common people. However, a miracle of this type (a white hand) was not of the same level as the other miracles displayed by Musa (A), each of which was amazing and unique in its own right. Furthermore, the miracle of the white hand (as currently described) would not convince the masses that an extra-ordinary act was taking place, or weaken the position of the magicians and convince them to come out to the arena of confrontation.

۳. This miracle was only visible to the group who had gathered around Prophet Musa (A) and it was difficult for those who were even a few metres away from him to see it

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clearly.

To support our claim that the arguments above are weak, we can refer to another verse:

فَأَلْقَى عَصَاهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ ثُعْبَانٌ مُّبِينٌ {٥} وَنَزَعَ يَدَهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ بَيْضَاء لِلنَّاظِرِينَ

So he cast down his rod, and lo! it was an obvious serpent; And he drew forth his hand, (and lo! it appeared white to the onlookers. (al-Shu'ara, ۲۶/۳۱-۳۲

The verse above describes how Prophet Musa (A) first cast down his staff in front of a large crowd of Fir'awn's people and others that had been assembled to watch him. The staff turned into a large dragon and caused consternation in the assembly; it was .then that that he displayed his second miracle, which was his radiant hand

If we assume that that the hand of the Prophet (A) became white only to the extent that it resembled someone with a skin-related illness, it would not be visible except to a small group of the crowd who had gathered, and would not have qualified as a miracle that heralded his Divinely-appointed mission and that served as the main proof of his claim. It would not be enough to bring about popular acceptance in his Prophethood or cause the wonderment that would bring about a deep and positive transformation in the hearts and minds of the people and broaden the horizons of .their thinking

:About the specific time when the miracle took place, the Qur'an states

قَالَ مَوْعِدُكُمْ يَوْمُ الزِّينَهِ وَأَن يُحْشَرَ النَّاسُ ضُحًى

Musa) said: Your appointment is the day of the Festival and let the people be)

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(gathered together in the early forenoon. (Ta Ha, ۲۰/۵۹

It is possible that Prophet Musa (A) chose this special time for the display of his miracle because by then the sun was at its highest point and the day was at its brightest so that nobody would be able to deny the occurrence and nature of the miracle and everyone would see it clearly.

How can we imagine that at this time of the day in the bright sunlight, his miracle merely resembled the hand of a sick person, so that people confused the whiteness of the hand of Prophet Musa (A) for leprosy, while God informed them that what they

were witnessing was the miracle of their Prophet and not a type of affliction of the !skin

With this interpretation we cannot expect that this display of the whiteness of his hand, which is devoid of any brilliance or radiance, to transform the audience or be effective in convincing them to abandon their erroneous beliefs and submit to the claims of the Messenger of God. This is because a miracle demonstrates its relation to the Creator and the Knower of revelation, and its nature is such that it cannot be challenged by people who are unaware of the supernatural world and those who .witness it feel that have been allowed a new chance to discover the truth

:On the other hand, the Qur'an states

وَمَا نُرِيهِم مِّنْ آيَةٍ إِلَّا هِيَ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ أُخْتِهَا وَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِالْعَذَابِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

And We did not show them a sign

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but it was greater than it's like, and We overtook them with chastisement that they (may turn. (al-Zukhruf, ۴۳/۴۸

In this verse it has been specified that each miracle that Prophet Musa (A) displayed was followed by a bigger and more important miracle. This demonstrates a subtle and important point which is a methodology to encourage informed choice and for the staged development of man to a level where his thinking changes. This is because if, some of those whose thinking was perverted were not convinced by the first miracle, the second miracle might be more compelling and inspire them and bring life to their .dead hearts and encourage them to search for the truth

Thus on the day of their festival, and in the midst of the multitudes loyal to Fir'awn, when the Prophet of God cast his staff on the ground and demonstrated that awesome miracle which caused astonishment and consternation to all, if we imagine that the second miracle – the white hand – only resembled the whiteness of the hand of a person with some sickness, how can we say it was greater and more important

than the first miracle? When such whiteness is not only less remarkable than the first .miracle, but is not even equivalent or comparable to it

By taking into account the arguments above, it seems that the interpretation of the white hand resembling that of a sick person is not plausible and we need to re-examine the matter to remove the difficulties mentioned

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.above

:This Divine miracle can be explained in the following manner

Since the term used for whiteness (bayda) is also a synonym for the sun, the nature of this miracle is according to one of three possibilities: either the level of radiance and brightness of the hand of Prophet Musa (A) was of a lower intensity that the radiance of the sun, which would not be noticeable by the people; or it is equal in intensity to that of the sun, which likewise would not cause that much amazement; therefore, the only remaining possibility is that the brightness of the Prophet's hand must have been more intense than the sun so that its penetrating illumination would cause wonderment in every observer. In this way it would send a message to those who sought the path of true guidance to consider this miracle as a conclusive proof of prophethood which originates from a Divine source, and ultimately force the people of .Fir'awn to grudgingly submit to the truth

According to medical science, a radiance and brilliance more intense than that of the sun cannot be tolerated by human eyes, and if the intensity is greater than the capacity of the eyes to bear, it will be damaging to every eye directed at it. A further danger also exists in that it may damage the retinas just as when one stares overlong at the sun; therefore, it seems that the Qur'an is indicating that the miracle here is that the light radiating from the hand

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of Musa (A), although brighter than the light of the sun, is perfectly harmless to the

.gaze and does not damage the vision of the onlookers in any way

Now it becomes clear that that this new interpretation of the phrase, “white without evil”, can reinforce the view that the radiant light that issued from the hand of the Prophet of God, and which lit up the surroundings, did not cause any damage to the .onlookers

By keeping in mind the preceding discussion, the meaning of the word “bayda” also becomes clear; here it does not denote normal whiteness; rather the meaning of brilliance and illumination is more compatible with the verse. (۱) This meaning for bayda is also normally found in the terminology of jurisprudence (fiqh); for example, in the expression, “the brilliant nights” (ayam al-bayd), which are the nights during which the moon is at its most luminous. These examples can be of use in .revealing the facts and provide another proof for the matter discussed above

:From the foregoing, the verse can be translated as follows

O Musa, put your hand into your collar and when you draw it out, it shall be radiant“ without causing any damage; this is one of nine miracles with which you have been sent to Fir‘awn and his people, indeed, they are a transgressing and rebellious (nation.” (al-Naml, ۲۷/۱۲

The Manifestation of Qur’anic Wisdom in the Laws of Inheritance

يُوصِيكُمُ اللّهُ فِى أَوْلاَدِكُمْ لِلذَّكَرِ مِثْلُ حَظِّ الأُنثَيَيْنِ

God enjoins you concerning your children: the male shall have a share (of inheritance) ;equal to the share of two females

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۱- The late Mulla Muhsin Fayd in his exegesis of the verse states: “He would take his hand out of his collar and illuminate his surroundings.” (Tafsir Safi, ۴/۸۹). Therefore, at those moments of the day, the brilliance of the white hand of Prophet Musa (A) would be brighter than the sun, otherwise the statement that his hand illuminated his

surroundings in the day time would not make any sense. Allama Majlisi states in his exegesis of this verse: "The radiance that issued from the hand of Prophet Musa (A) was brighter than that of the sun." (Bihar al-Anwar, ۱۳/۷۸). Abu'l Futuh Razi also states in his exegesis of the verse that: "He would draw his hand out from his collar and it would appear white and it would be brighter than the sun." (Tafsir Razi, ۷/۳۵۳). The author of Nasikh al-Tawarikh also states: "He would draw his hand out of the opening at his collar and it would be as bright as the sun and it would light up the scene in a manner that nobody could look directly at it." (Nasikh al-Tawarikh, ۱/۳۷۳). All these statements show that the explanation that the whiteness of the hand of the Messenger of God was similar to the whiteness of a skin affliction – which the great exegetes have generally inferred from the phrase, "white without evil" – does not .agree with any of the reports mentioned above

(al-Nisa, ۴/۱۰)

وَإِن كَانُواْ إِخْوَةً رِّجَالاً وَنِسَاء فَلِلذَّكَرِ مِثْلُ حَظِّ الأُنثَيَيْنِ

And if there are (several) siblings, men and women, then the male shall have the like (of the portion of two females; (al-Nisa, ۴/۱۷۶

As mentioned in the foregoing verses, Islam has ordained that the share of the man in inheritance should be twice that of the female and has called its followers to practice this Divine decree. This matter requires some deliberation and analysis; however, :before we begin a discussion about this ruling, we need to remind ourselves that

A debate about the respective inheritance of men and women must not be devoted to supporting the rights of men while ignoring the high status and actual rights of women; rather the intention should be to defend the sanctity of revelation, which has prescribed a course based on the intrinsic nature of human beings and what is in their true best interest. Accordingly, it becomes evident that the discussion at hand will not be influenced by man-made social norms, which are subject to change in every era, even though the social environment in its own way exerts such a tremendous influence on the thinking of the populace that it even sways the opinions of some of its .intellectuals

:After this preamble, we now embark on a closer study of the issue

Islam treats men and women in a manner that is comprehensive, taking into account all aspects of their existence, in recognition of their valuable place in creation. On the one hand, in its prescriptive

guidance (revelation), Islam considers the essential worthiness and the spiritual potential of men and women to be the same; each one of them, through suitable .actions, can achieve their maximum and deserved potential

On the other hand, if we consider the opinions and findings of psychologists and physiologists about the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual differences between men and women based on their research and observation, we find that the rights and responsibilities of men and women have been prescribed by taking into account their inner and real differences, which does not affect their essential equality or their dignity as human beings. In other words, in the view of religion, the actual and natural differences of the two sexes does not mean that there is any difference in their .respective worth

There is no doubt that in the course of the social development of human beings, the female sex has always been the subject of oppression and denial of rights. She has .suffered much deprivation at the hands of men

On the other hand, there is also no doubt that the many remedial and radical developments through the ages, have inclined towards the opposite extreme; and the attempts to resolve the conflict has not achieved a balanced result in this regard, .despite well-meaning efforts

Amongst them, the seekers of women's rights are no exception and we have witnessed many times their disproportionate behaviour in the defence of the rights of .women

As for the fact that equality in every aspect between the rights of men

and women has been declared as a basic and established truth by those who defend women’s rights; we must analyze the basis on which this view has been formed, and .to what extent it is logical and whether it is compatible with reality

It is true that both men and women are partners in the human race, and both possess equal human rights and virtues; however, there are undeniable differences in their physical and emotional compositions. Of course, these differences are not defects, by which one sex can claim superiority over the other; rather, they are differences that make them distinct from one another. Consequently, when it is claimed that the two sexes “must” have the same rights as each other, we need to ask, where is this “must” (derived from?(۱

The equality of rights of individuals of one sex is a matter that is logical and tenable; however, the equality of rights, in all aspects, of two different sexes (in view of their emotional and physical differences) requires proof to support the claim; and if a proof for this equality in all aspects and dimensions is not forthcoming or produced, then the claim of the need for equality of rights is baseless and illogical; in truth, a robust .validation of this claim is still pending

A cursory glance at the many and varied feminist ideas and views will reveal the truth :of the matters stated above

The ideology of feminism was established in the West as a movement that sought ;women’s rights

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۱ - To date, those who defend the rights of women have always presented the principle of equal rights as fundamental and undeniable and therefore, they have questioned why there is a difference between the inheritance of men and women in Islamic law. However, they have ignored the point that the actual question they should first answer is that on what basis is the principle of equal rights of the sexes

.founded, when there are clear differences between men and women

even though it is possible that its proponents, especially women, started this movement sincerely in order to attain the true rights of women, the existence of capitalist and economical motives behind the propagation of the feminist ideology at (the stage of its inception cannot be denied. (۱

However, aside from the factors that influenced the dawn of this ideology, even nowadays, feminism has been transformed into many different schools and theories, and every group who propagates this ideology has embarked on its own particular course, often criticizing the stance of others and insisting that their own opinions are .the most progressive

The proponents of women's rights originally advocated equality of rights for men and women. The views of Simone de Beauvoir, as outlined in her book, "The Second Sex" – which has become famous as the "Bible of Feminism" – are based on this same principle that since men and women are both human beings, they should have equal .rights

However, the course of social development forced feminists to review their thinking, to the degree that they were no longer content with espousing equal rights for men and women, but went further to state that females were the superior sex. In essence, this was the exact opposite of the extreme view that had deprived women of their rights in the first place. Extremism appeared in the school of feminism, to the extent that one radical feminist, Andrea Dworkin, embarked on a scathing criticism of masculinity and considered maleness to be essentially synonymous with

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۱ – The historical background of this ideology and coincident with its inception, is the industrial revolution in England, which led to the movement demanding voting rights for women. In the face of the industrial changes that were sweeping across Europe the governments could now tax women, because only those who paid taxes had the .right to vote in elections

.violence, death and destruction

Today, in practical terms, the principle of equality is not always practised in western societies; for instance, when they say that men and women must receive equal rights because of the fact that they are both human beings, in the matter of child custody the courts rule in favour of women on the basis of their sex, and not on the basis of their membership of the human race. Contrary to the claim of equality in every respect, this is a legal rule that is openly biased and unfair to men and which the .judiciary invariably supports

Finally, the emergence of post-modernism in contemporary times, which has influenced many modern ideologies and schools of thought, has also changed the focus of feminists regarding the pursuit of women's rights. Specifically, a new group of feminists have stood up against the excesses of the era of modernism, by emphasising the importance of the maternal role of women. In fact, this group believe that both men and women possess special unique qualities. Thus, they extol matters such as pregnancy and the nursing of infants as distinctive values which are exclusive to women, and criticize the extremists by asking how they could ignore this precious feminine quality when considering the rights of women? (۱)۸

In any case, in view of the transformations in the ideology of feminism, in addition to the fundamental question already mentioned about the absence of logical and decisive proofs to validate their main claims, we also need to ask how

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۱ - For a more comprehensive review, refer to "Modern Political Ideologies", by Andrew Vincent. (The author has relied on a translation of this work by Murtada Thabitfar); also "Huquq-e Zan dar Keshakesh-e Sunnat wa Tajaddud", by Muhammad Hakimipur, "Feminesm 'Alayhi Zanan", by Sayyid Ibrahim Husaini, as quoted in the .(Journal of Book reviews, Faslname-ye Kitab naqd, No. ۱۷, Winter ۱۳۷۹ (lunar

long and to what degree will these various contrasting opinions about women's rights ?continue to change? And where will this development ultimately stop and settle

Furthermore, who is the most qualified to select the correct view from amongst the plethora of opinions on the subject, and will the view of these experts not be later ?subjected to criticism and review

It must not be forgotten that that although the proponents of equal rights for men and women have not explicitly discussed the different faculties of reasoning, intellect, labour and management of the two sexes, nevertheless they always take into account these undeniable and fundamental differences that are integral to the two sexes and apply them in the variety of social issues. This fact is borne out by statistics which analyse how, in practice and in different social settings; men are selected much more often than women to managerial posts. They also conclusively show how, in societies which clamour about equality of rights between men and women, the intellectual and labour output of men and women are rewarded in an inconsistent and .biased manner

It is a clear reality that the physical constitutions of men and women are suited to particular responsibilities; men are suited to performing heavy and rugged work and in contrast, women are more suited to lighter and more delicate tasks. This is a .difference that the Creator has placed in the essence of the two sexes

If the rights of both sexes must be identical, then the work that the two

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can do should likewise be distributed in an identical manner, because it is not logical !that the tasks be different but the rights be the same

The other factor that results in the difference in rights, is the difference in responsibilities. Let us consider a factory, an office or a manufacturing plant in which there are many workers busy doing a variety of tasks. One is the president, and others, depending on their level of expertise, are advisers, employees and labourers. It is obvious that the rights of the president are different from that of everyone else and this difference will not be considered to be unjustified, because his rights are .proportional to the responsibilities he bears

This is a sensible system that has been accepted by all societies. If all the salaried workers in one department are men, or all of them are women, or both men and women run the department, even then, the situation will be the same. A president, even if she is a woman, will have a higher salary than the male employees, because her responsibilities are different. Therefore, in these situations, no one will claim equal .rights for men and women

This difference in responsibilities, which in turn causes the difference in rights, is an accepted convention. At this point, the question arises that when a difference in responsibilities results in a difference in rights – and this matter raises no protest or objection – then why should the differences in the responsibilities of men and women due

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to their nature and disposition, which are immutable and go back to the essence of their respective existences, not result in a difference in the rights of the two? Is there an argument that proves that the differences in responsibilities which raise and lower individual rights, are only limited to conventional responsibilities, and do not ?encompass natural and existential differences

The implication of the foregoing question is that, if the proponents of equal rights between men and women want to ignore the natural and distinct responsibilities of the two sexes by formulating laws bases on equal rights, then they are acting contrary to nature. Laws can always be made according to their whims and desires, !but nature itself cannot be changed

And finally, there is another question that arises here, and that is: When national and private companies are allowed to make distinctions in the job specifications of the male and female employees, and thereby, allocate different rights to them, and diverse societies also accept this practice as normal, why is a religious school of thought not allowed to pronounce the rights of the men and women who are its ?adherents on the basis of the responsibilities it has allocated to each one

If the differences in conventional rights as practised by private and public institutions or by particular individuals have raised no objections and are accepted norms in all societies, why are the differences in rights as espoused by a religion challenged? When an ordinary employer has the right to decide the

duties of the employees working in his company as well as their rights, why can't the founder of a great intellectual and spiritual movement not do the same for its followers and adherents? That too, a religion that has placed a great financial responsibility on the shoulders of its male followers; a religion that makes a man responsible for procuring every necessary provision for his wife commensurate to her status and rank; in these circumstances, justice dictates that the share of men and .women in inheritance must be different

Let us assume that a father who wishes to allocate some money to his two sons, gives the married son twice as much as the one who is unmarried. Can one say that the right of the unmarried son has been violated, or that he has been disadvantaged because he received less? Here too, there is a difference, but it is based on justice and fairness, because if the father gave both sons the same amount, morally he would be guilty of unjust discrimination; similarly there is a difference in the inheritance of men and women according to the law of sharia; however, it is a just distribution based on the lighter responsibility placed on the woman, and which is fairly reflected in the .lesser amount that she inherits

This is when in general, for most families, one can reasonably say that the expenses a man incurs in supporting his wife in the course of their married life is many times greater than the

amount which the woman would inherit if she was to receive equal shares to her male .siblings

As a rule, the financial commitments that a man undertakes has an influence; when the man guarantees the living expenses of his wife, he feels a greater sense of responsibility towards her. This will engender a positive reaction from the wife, who sees herself as indebted to her husband and strives to repay her debt by fostering a .relationship with him based on love, respect and collaboration

As a result of the increased sense of responsibility on the part of the husband towards his wife on the one hand and the sense of indebtedness on the part of the wife towards the husband on the other, there is an increase in their mutual love and affection and this will help to strengthen the foundations of their family life. This same strengthening effect would not arise if the woman received a greater share in .inheritance

From the dawn of Islam to the present, millions of Muslim brothers and sisters, wives and husbands have lived genially side by side, without the disparity in the share of inheritance causing any disruption in the order of Muslim family life; in fact, there has not even been much evidence of dissatisfaction at this arrangement which would cast a shadow on their cordial relations or cause rifts between family members. And, the rare events when there have been family disputes due to the shares in inheritance, do not invalidate the general situation

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.stated above

One of the interesting developments in recent times is the increased tendency for women in the West (in comparison to men) to turn towards Islam. Despite all the efforts of some western agencies to convince women that Islam denies women their rights – and in their widespread propaganda they do not refrain from every allegation .of the violation of rights – nevertheless, more women turn to Islam than men

This fact can be easily seen from statistical reports and must not be dismissed lightly; rather we need to study this matter carefully and think about the possible factors that would make a woman from the western society become prepared to ignore the equal

right of inheritance that she has been granted through the laws of her country (a law that was enacted with the material benefit of women in mind), in favour of a religion .which has directed that the share in inheritance of men is twice that of women

Is it possible to overlook the influential factor of innate human nature (fitra), which is related to the true essence of human beings and ignore the specific essential nature of the female sex in this regard? Especially when we know that Islam has taken into account the spiritual and physical differences between men and women as the basis for the laws of inheritance. When a law has been enacted on the basis of justice and is rooted in the depths of human nature, why should it be subject to change

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and reform? And what should it place as its focus instead of justice and innate human ?nature

If man-made laws had positively addressed the needs that originate from the depths of the human being and satisfied his inner feelings, then such issues would not .warrant consideration

In addition to what has already been mentioned, another aspect of the Divine wisdom in the laws of inheritance is the economical aspect; specifically: In the west, the wealth that reaches women through inheritance is equal to that which men receive in .the same way

However, in most cases the wealth of women is used less in the way of industry and sound business, and a large portion of it is usually spent on decorations, superfluous ceremonies, luxuries and jewellery, nonessential goods and various diversions; not only is this wasteful, but it is also against moral decency, causing emotional anguish in poor families and ultimately resulting in a social malaise and a culture of overindulgence and extravagance; it is possible that if this same wealth was in the hands of men, they would use it to develop business and financial enterprises and investments that would appreciate in value, resulting in a betterment of their .economical status

It is not without reason that the development and flourishing of the economies in western societies has come about from the wealth of men, and most businesses and financial institutions in these same societies that are clamouring for equal rights for men and women, are in fact related to men.

Another factor

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is to do with the supervision of the family. In reality, the role of men and women is to complete and perfect one another, therefore, the correct use of the capacity of each one in the assistance of the other enables their joint life to proceed smoothly, and this division of responsibilities and planning in their associated lives caters for the needs of the family.

When the Qur'an places the responsibility of protection and supervision on the shoulders of men by stating:

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاء

(Men are the protectors of women (al-Nisa, ۴/۳۴)

it does not mean to say that men are the leaders or that one sex is superior to the other at the level of humanity. When a man and woman live together as partners and embark on family life, especially a family founded on the principle of mutual cooperation and understanding, which of the individuals has the better ability to supervise the family and provide for its expenses; the man, the woman or the children? (۱)

When we look at the prevailing situation in society, we see that the owner of a business, who has employed several individuals, and whom he pays for their services, naturally takes over the role of supervisor of his employees without having been elected to the post by anybody. This is a conventional practice and the employees accept the situation without question.

The Qur'an also mentions the role of the man as the supervisor of the family unit as a matter of accepted practice and not a

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۱ - It is possible that in some cases women are more qualified to supervise than their husbands, however, invariably, the law does not mention all special cases, and is concerned with the general situation amongst human beings.

new innovation. It supports what is the normal practice in society, and by the use of the phrase, "and because they spend out of their wealth" (bima anfaqu), in the verse above, it alludes to the same issue that the greater claim of the man to the role of supervisor and protector is linked to the responsibility of providing for the family's needs that rests on his shoulders.

This rational principle is intertwined with the essence of existence; meaning that, in addition to human beings who have acknowledged, out of a natural instinct, the role of the man as a supervisor and protector, the same situation exists naturally in the animal kingdom as well, and examples of this behaviour are clearly observable in many aspects of their life.

Here it is appropriate to mention another issue also; that which is commonly heard in the west from the same groups of enlightened thinkers and proponents of freedom is the rights of homosexuals, and there is a tendency even amongst the most distinguished thinkers to be drawn towards this matter in the name of the defence of freedom. Perhaps it will not be many years before the rights of homosexuals are catered for in the whole of western society and their rights are accepted as a natural and expected feature to a point where any objection raised will be considered as an unacceptable about-turn and no one will be able to say anything or raise any objection about the matter.

When it becomes acceptable to base

legislation on the low and base desires of humanity, every sacred value will be discarded and society will descend into moral decadence and decay. The fact is that the procedure of this legislation is fundamentally incompatible with the essential nature of mankind, and that which is presented in the name of the preservation of freedom, should be confined to that kind of freedom that facilitates the wholesome and balanced needs of humankind, and not the demands that arise from unnatural .and unhealthy temperaments

If, under the banner of freedom and the protection by law, this abnormal and aberrant sexual conduct becomes pervasive and common, then, as a consequence of the actions of the same enlightened and broadminded thinkers and defenders of women's rights, half of humankind in western society itself – its women – will become deprived of marrying and having a normal physical relationship with the opposite sex and in the fullness of time, this community will have to face the threat of extinction. Is the enactment of such laws in the best interests of mankind and do they have results ?and consequences worth defending

If we review the history of legislation in different nations of the world, we come across laws for which thinkers and experts had put in a lot of thought and effort; yet with the passing of time, and on deeper reflection and analysis, the miscalculations of the legislators, and the weakness, inadequacy and ineffectiveness of those laws have been ultimately exposed. That which in yesteryears was

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considered by visionaries to be the ideal and most effective manner of governing their societies, has come to be acknowledged as the product of an improper and .incomplete understanding

Therefore, they turn to a new system of legislation, and despite the progress in ideas and thoughts of intellectual and experts, the search (for perfect law) still occupies the .minds of researchers

How often have a large group of scholars unanimously backed a particular ideal, yet

with the passage of time and the advance of knowledge, the weakness and error of .their views is conclusively proved

It is universally accepted by scientists, working in different fields, that without understanding and taking into account the essential nature of man, planning and the .creation of schemes and programs will be of little worth

It cannot be denied that today, despite the vast knowledge at mankind's disposal in every field, there are many peaks that have not yet been scaled, especially in matters to do with the inner and spiritual realm that exists inside man; indeed in his spiritual potential man is a deep ocean and our knowledge about it is negligible. As a consequence, planning and the formulating of legislation to govern the life of man, whose true identity and essence is shrouded in mystery, is similar to planning a .course of treatment for an invalid whose illness is unknown

The formulation of legislation not only calls for a complete and all-encompassing knowledge about every facet of man's being, rather it also requires a thorough knowledge of society

and its convoluted social interrelationships as well as the knowledge of other .creatures whose lives are also interwoven with mankind

On what authority and knowledge do those who claim that they desire the flourishing ?and felicity of human society base their plans and schemes

The fact is that the knowledge and perception of mankind is not yet able to fully comprehend the inner physical and spiritual properties of human beings and the mysteries of social conduct that arise from the interaction of individuals with one another. As a result, man is unable to address the diverse needs of humanity and distinguish the correct course from the multiple paths that present themselves before .him

Even if the principles that lead to human perfection are understood, human

knowledge and intellect is unable to solitarily answer the multitude of questions that arise, and take sole responsibility for directing the progress of humanity in every sphere according to the Divine plan. It is only when man searches within himself and makes use of the values that are buried in his heart and nature that he will achieve success and create a system that takes into account the different aspects of his .existence

The truth is that when formulating legislation, man is not able to remain immune from his own personal nature and character; the differences amongst individuals in their upbringing, cultural and social norms, familial customs and other factors deeply influence their perceptions, decisions and opinions. The interpretation of terms and ideas are not the same by all

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individuals in a society, each understands according to his own insight and views. The thoughts and ideas of legislators and regulators who embark on studying human nature are also drawn, knowingly or unwittingly, towards preconceptions acquired from their particular environment and therefore they are unable to make impartial .analyses of situations

All this indicates the futility of expecting human intellect and knowledge to single-handedly be able to serve this need and it is a decisive affirmation of the fact that human legislation can be potentially very damaging. It is here that we must acknowledge that one cannot submit with certitude and confidence to such a doubtful system and entrust one’s prosperity to it. Even if we assume that a day will come when the knowledge of man will be able to encompass all facets of human existence, even then that will not guarantee the wellbeing of mankind because man is naturally .prone to making decisions based on his personal and selfish interests

Keeping these various difficulties in mind, the well-known western thinker Rousseau :writes

To discover the best laws which will be beneficial to nations, one has to necessarily “

seek out a perfect intellect, who is cognizant of all human lusts and frailties but is himself not affected by them. He should have no relationship to nature, but yet have a complete knowledge of it. His own prosperity should not depend on us, but he should be ready to assist us to achieve our own prosperity…” (١)

Dr Carrel writes on the same subject:

“The

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١- Social Conventions, p. ٨١.

systems of government, entirely constructed in the minds of doctrinaires, are valueless. The principles of the French Revolution, the visions of Marx and Lenin, apply only to abstract men. It must be clearly realized that the laws of human relations are still unknown. Sociology and economics are conjectural sciences – that is, pseudo-sciences.

Thus, it appears that the environment, which science and technology have succeeded in developing for man, does not suit him, because it has been constructed at random, without regard for his true self.” (١)

Therefore, the right to formulate law is more suited to the One whose sacred being is not subject to the conditions and influences of the environment, nor can failure in any task be ever imagined for Him. His limitless knowledge completely encompasses the entirety of existence and He knows the fundamental and true needs of man and is aware of the boundaries of his potential and the changes and developments that human beings and the universe are yet to go through. And He is God, and the right to systematize legislation is only befitting for Him.

The Qur’an states:

أَفَحُكْمَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ يَبْغُونَ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللّهِ حُكْمًا لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ

Is it then the judgment of (the times of) ignorance that they desire? And who is better (than Allah to judge for a people who are sure? (al-Ma'ida, ۵/۵۰

The Correct Approach to Reconciliation and its Positive Consequences

وَإِن طَائِفَتَانِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ اقْتَتَلُوا فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا فَإِن بَغَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا عَلَى الْأُخْرَى فَقَاتِلُوا الَّتِي تَبْغِي حَتَّى تَفِيءَ إِلَى أَمْرِ اللَّهِ فَإِن فَاءَتْ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا بِالْعَدْلِ وَأَقْسِطُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ

.Man, the Unknown, p. ۳۰ -۱

الْمُقْسِطِينَ

And if two parties of the believers quarrel, make peace between them; but if one of them acts wrongfully towards the other, fight that which acts wrongfully until it returns to Allah's command; then if it returns, make peace between them with justice (and act equitably; indeed Allah loves those who act equitably. (al-Hujurat, ۴۹/۹

God Almighty has stated that amongst the qualities of the nation of the Prophet of Islam (S) is their temperance and moderation. The directives of God, the All-Wise, are also based on these qualities and indeed, it is an integral feature of Divine wisdom that God advocates a medium course distinct from any sort of extremes, known as the straight path (sirat al-mustaqim). In the verse above also, which discusses reconciliation between two disputing parties, all aspects have been considered so that the prescribed remedy is not just based on sentiment and accommodation; rather, compromise is tempered by reason, and moral, instructive and social considerations .are taken into account as well

:An exposition of the actual message contained in the verse is as follows

A dispute or altercation between two parties is not always of one type or category; rather it arises from a variety of disagreements that can flare up between individuals,

leading to a disruption in the calm and peace in a society. The various forms and manner of the disagreements and the objectives behind them and the nature of the confrontation will each influence the strategies adopted to defuse them. For this reason, it is

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necessary to carefully consider all the issues so that the remedial strategy and reconciliatory effort does not lead to an undesirable result. In the verse under consideration also, the manners of resolving the dispute differ according to the type .of dispute, and each must be countered with the appropriate action

Occasionally, it is possible that a suspicion or mistake or misunderstanding angers individuals – and often there will be those who will inflame the situation and increase the mistrust even further – resulting in an argument setting two parties at one .another's throats, even when initially neither side intended any harm to the other

In this case, the Qur'an advises the well-wishers and peacemakers of the society to step in and mediate between the two parties and attempt reconciliation before the situation escalates out of control and blood is shed. However, unlike the last portion of the verse, the Qur'an does not initially state that peacemaking be contingent on justice, it merely states that the well-wishers should bring about peace and reconciliation between the two factions (faslihu baynahuma). This is in the particular case where neither party has violated the others' rights, and only a quarrel has broken out. At this point it was not necessary for God to order reconciliation, that too, .accompanied by an emphasis on justice

However, if one of the two quarrelling parties aggressively resorts to violent behaviour and tramples on the principles of decency and civility, then it must be stopped by any means. If stern action that causes

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the aggressors to desist and accept God's law, then the Qur'an directs that

.reconciliation be affected by keeping in mind fairness and justice

There is a very subtle but important point that can be inferred here from the verse, which is that, one must in every situation keep in mind Islam's primary objectives of nurturing and developing society, and its emphasis on establishing and administering the nation of Islam on the foundation of justice and fairness in its truest and widest meaning, and its desire to remove every tendency for injustice and transgression from the minds of individuals in the society; it is only through these considerations that we can gain a profound understanding of the Qur'an's emphasis on reconciliation .accompanied by justice

When the Qur'an advises mediators and peacemakers to reconcile between two quarrelling parties with absolute justice and equity, it does not mean to warn the mediators not to do themselves injustice to one part while they seek peace and compromise, because mediators are normally impartial and well-meaning. In fact, the intention is to advise them that the manner in which they attempt reconciliation should be such that each party precisely receives their legitimate right, neither having to give up something, nor receiving anything undeserved, even if it is by mutual understanding. Therefore, the mediators must not make it their ultimate objective to .achieve reconciliation at any cost

In reality, this means that granting concessions should not be the basis of reconciliation and arbitration, even if it is with the consent

of the wronged party, because the aggressors have deliberately brought about .confrontation so that they may gain concession by extortion

In such cases, it would be a mistake if the mediators, who wish to investigate and verify the incident from close quarters before taking the steps to resolve the dispute by arbitration, direct their efforts to insisting on indulgence and overlooking the past in an attempt to end the conflict. If they advise one party to forgo its rights to the benefit of the other in order to achieve peace and in this manner bring the matter to a

close, it will only serve to increase the recalcitrance of the aggressors who had tried .to gain the upper hand through force and oppression

And often, whenever opportunities arise in the future they would use these precedents as a leverage for personal gain; usually mediators also, at the time of peacemaking, satisfy the offenders by granting them concessions so that they might desist from their transgression and give up their oppressive behaviour, and leave their victims in peace. Here, the oppressors become the winners and the oppressed .are the losers. In this manner, peace may be achieved but justice has not taken place

Although the oppressed part may concede certain rights to extricate themselves from further trouble from the aggressors, these concessions, even when offered voluntarily, will invariably have negative consequences. For this reason, the Qur’an insists that reconciliation must be enacted without recourse to compromise or .renouncing one’s rights

In these circumstances, if

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the transgressors insist on continuing on their course, according to the Qur’an, they will have to confront the whole Muslim community, who are duty-bound to come to the aid of the oppressed faction. Thus, the reason for the Qur’anic insistence on reconciliation coupled with equity in the verse under consideration, which can be ,deduced from the repetition of the terms ‘adl and qist (justice and equity) three times

فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا بِالْعَدْلِ وَأَقْسِطُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

make peace between them with justice and act equitably; indeed Allah loves those (who act equitably. (al-Hujurat, ۴۹/۹

is realised when the mediators, in their reconciliatory efforts, consider thoroughly the deeper and fundamental nature of the altercation, and deliberate carefully over the motives behind the dispute. If they determine that the motivation was extortion or bullying, then they should use force to stop the aggressors from achieving their

.objectives

If reconciliation and resolution of conflicts is carried out in an incorrect manner, that is, by giving and taking concessions, it will be like a double-edged sword which will damage both factions; on the one hand, the oppressed individual will feel that the mediators would not, or could not, prevent his rights from being infringed and bring about a just resolution, because in practical terms, his aggressor has profited at his .expense

On the other hand, the aggressor will feel that his unreasonable tactics were ultimately successful and got him what he wanted. However, what is befitting for a true Islamic society is a settlement that is equitable and just overall, not one

in which the one individual eschews his rights allowing another to achieve his unjust .goals

If, during the course of the altercation, the possibility of resolution by compromise arises, then an aggrieved individual can personally extricate himself from the crisis by offering a concession and thereby deliver himself from the malice of the aggressor. In this case, there would be no need for others to involve themselves in the matter and .seek mediation

However, in this verse, the Qur’an has placed the responsibility of reconciliation on the shoulders if the Islamic society and compelled the nation to resolutely rise to the defence of the oppressed whenever they witness any injustice. They should limit the actions of the aggressor, and stop him, and not try to make the oppressed party accept the unfair actions perpetrated against them, or embark on a course of action .that results in the benefit of the perpetrator

:The Qur’an states

وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُم بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَن تَحْكُمُواْ بِالْعَدْلِ

(and that when you judge between people you judge with justice; (al-Nisa', ۴/۵۸

It is true that in the reconciliation that we are discussing we do not mean the recourse to a court of law. Rather, we have been concerned with the efforts of mediators to reconcile between two quarrelling factions. Islam attaches much importance to a comprehensive justice system; indeed one of the main objectives of the great Prophets (A) was to constantly strive to establish justice and equity in human :societies. In this regard, the Qur'an states

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ

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الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ

Certainly We sent Our messengers with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the balance that men may conduct themselves with equity; (al-Hadid, (۵۷/۲۵

Therefore if we ponder over the matter carefully, we will realize that exceeding the bounds of justice and violating the rights of others – at every occasion and stage, even in the case of reconciliation and arbitration, and even with mutual consent – is .not compatible with the Islamic spirit of justice

Renouncing and forgoing one's rights may sometimes be a necessary, even admirable action, and beneficial in its own right; it may get results and indeed, bring about a change of heart. However, when it is at the expense of justice, not only is it not helpful, it is counterproductive and as we stated, in the long run it will invariably have a negative effect on the mind of the aggressor who set out to gain an advantage through intimidation, and will encourage him to act in a similar fashion in the future. The result will be that he will gain and benefit from every altercation, whereas the objective of Islam is to eradicate oppression and injustice from the midst of Muslim society, so that people can be assured that no one will be able to acquire anything by .force or unfairness

:The commander of the faithful, Ali (A) has stated

ظلم الاحسان واضعه فی غیر موضعه

The disservice to ihsan (goodness) is exercising it in the wrong place. (Ghurar-al-Hikam, p. ۴۹۸)

An Analysis of Two Qur'anic Terms

۱) وَأَنجَيْنَا مُوسَى

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وَمَن مَّعَهُ أَجْمَعِينَ {٥} ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا الْآخَرِينَ {٥} إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ {٥} وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

And We saved Musa and those with him, all of them. Then We drowned the others. Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them do not believe. And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful. (al-Shu'ara', ۲۶/۶۵-۶۸)

۲) كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

The people of Nuh rejected the messengers. (al-Shu'ara', ۲۶/۱۰۵)

فَأَنجَيْنَاهُ وَمَن مَّعَهُ فِي الْفُلْكِ الْمَشْحُونِ {٥} ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا بَعْدُ الْبَاقِينَ {٥} إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ {٥} وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

So We delivered him and those with him in the laden ark. Then We drowned the rest afterwards. Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them do not believe. And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful. (al-Shu'ara', ۲۶/۱۱۹-۱۲۲)

۳) كَذَّبَتْ عَادٌ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

Ad gave the lie to the messengers. (al-Shu'ara', ۲۶/۱۲۳)

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ {٥} وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

So they gave him the lie, then We destroyed them. Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them do not believe. And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful.

((al-Shu‘ara’, ۲۶/۱۳۹-۱۴۰

۴) كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

(Thamud gave the lie to the messengers. (al-Shu‘ara’, ۲۶/۱۴۱

فَأَخَذَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ إِنَّ فِى ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ {O} وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

So the punishment overtook them. Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them do not believe. And

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(most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful. (al-Shu‘ara’, ۲۶/۱۵۸-۱۵۹

۵) كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ لُوطٍ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

(The people of Lut gave the lie to the messengers. (al-Shu‘ara’, ۲۶/۱۶۰

وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهِم مَّطَرًا فَسَاء مَطَرُ الْمُنذَرِينَ {O} إِنَّ فِى ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ {O} وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

And We rained down upon them a rain, and evil was the rain on those warned. Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them do not believe. And most surely your (Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful. (al-Shu‘ara’, ۲۶/۱۷۳-۱۷۵

۶) كَذَّبَ أَصْحَابُ الْأَيْكَهِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

(The dwellers of the thicket gave the lie to the messengers. (al-Shu‘ara’, ۲۶/۱۷۶

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَخَذَهُمْ عَذَابُ يَوْمِ الظُّلَّهِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ {O} إِنَّ فِى ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً وَمَا كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ {O} وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

But they called him a liar, so the punishment of the day of covering overtook them; surely it was the punishment of a grievous day. Most surely there is a sign in this, but most of them do not believe. And most surely your Lord is Mighty, the Merciful. (al-(Shu‘ara’, ۲۶/۱۸۹-۱۹۱

The history of mankind and a thorough analysis of its development reveals a unique

repository of information; realities are revealed through deep contemplation of these .events – indeed, this is one of the soundest ways of discovering truths

The Qur'an encourages man to discover these truths by studying the factors that led to the successes and failures, and the rise and fall of previous nations, and the fate of those who violated the truth. By deliberating

over the laws and regular trends of history and studying accurate analyses of historical events, he can better interpret the various incidents and draw lessons and .benefit from the events of the day

The term, "'aziz" (mighty) is one of the most beautiful qualities of God that the Qur'an employs with great emphasis and frequency. This great attribute has nearly always been used in conjunction with the term, "hakim" (wise) in the Qur'an, and this pairing is an indication of the wisdom of God's speech; God, who is Mighty and Powerful, is at .the same time all-Wise

However, in Surat ul Shu'ara', this attribute of God has been mentioned in conjunction with another attribute: rahim (merciful). In fact, these two attributes recur in successive verses in this chapter; verses that recount the abominable behaviour of communities who rose in defiance against the Prophets sent to them, and hindered .their attempts to guide the people

In addition to the usage of the two terms side by side, their repetition is also :instructive and noteworthy, as we will now explain

Surat ul Shu'ara' mentions the incidents that invariably occurred with the Prophets of God. In this chapter the account of Prophet Musa (A) and Fir'awn is narrated first, and then after relating the accounts of other Prophets, namely Prophets Ibrahim (A), Nuh (A), Hud (A), Salih (A), Lut (A) and Shu'aib (A), the Qur'an talks of their tireless and determined efforts to propagate their messages, which contained the most .fundamental and deep truths, all over the world

And

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by recounting their struggle against the polytheism, corruption and oppression of their time, the verse consoles the Prophet of Islam (S) regarding the unpleasantness and difficulties that he was facing, and strengthen his heart with the following beautiful phrase, "so rely on the most-Mighty and Merciful." (wa tawakkal 'al'l 'aziz l-(rahim

In all the verses in which the terms 'aziz and rahim are mentioned together, the subject is the Divine retribution against the stubborn disbelievers for their lifelong recalcitrance and corrupt conduct and for rejecting the truth despite witnessing clear proofs. Their continuation down this path of darkness and their constant transgressions ultimately caused their hearts to be sealed, and left them to forever .wander in darkness

A question that arises here is: Why does the Qur'an use the terms 'aziz and rahim to describe God, the Holy, after describing the descent of His wrath and the deserved ?punishment of a nation who were destroyed for their atheism and defiance

To answer this question, we must understand the true meaning contained in these two Divine attributes and in particular, the significance of their repetition in Surat ul Shu'ara'. Additionally, we need to uncover what message there is for mankind in the .usage of the two terms in juxtaposition and what lesson we can learn from it

We know that amongst man's deviant inclinations is his selfish nature and his love of power. In human society we frequently see individuals who have an inflated sense of self-importance and are fond of exaggerating their achievements. This perverse inclination only serves to mislead and further

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increases the domination of base desires over the intellect of the individual and brings about many misfortunes for him. Of course, this quality is weaker in some individuals

.than in others

Even though there are individuals whose actions in life are principally motivated by noble intentions, who are able to distinguish the sensual elements of their predisposition from their true and sincere aspirations, and try hard to protect themselves from the allure of extreme and undesirable emotions, such individuals are very few in number and are rarely found amongst the general population in society. This is because to achieve such a harmonious balance requires a hard and .determined struggle against the soul

On the other hand, there are many who, due to their weak morals and desire to gain whatever limited power they can lay their hands on, will be prepared to sanction any transgression or destruction that will give them what they seek. They will react violently against any authority who attempts to forestall them while they try to slake their insatiable thirst for power. This is the nature of those who seek to rule over others, who always create in their minds an image of a perfect role model which satisfies their feeling of superiority, and then try to mould and change their persona .accordingly

We also clearly see that high ambition and power-seeking is always accompanied by a marked intolerance. This is not only limited to the case of men of power at the head ,of one or several countries

but is evident in the leaders of a township or village or even a small department. Even the leader of the smallest group is extremely sensitive and intolerant of the smallest .infraction from those under him

On the other hand, there is a close relationship between power and mercilessness; usually, the more the power a person has, the less merciful he becomes. He will blow out of proportion, and become enraged at, the smallest resistance to his power, he will harbour feelings of rage and revenge, and respond to any defiance of his authority in an intemperate manner, and this merciless behaviour will even extend, in

.the case of disobedience, to those closest to him

The Prophets of God taught mankind how to contemplate about the truth and freed them from the shackles of customs and baseless ancient rituals. Their opening message, which illuminated the horizons of human thought in every generation, was the call to tawhid (unity of God) and the repudiation of every form of polytheism and idolatry; they emphasised that salvation only lay in the belief in one God. Indeed, throughout history, every Divine caller has begun his message with the teaching of the unity, divinity and lordship of God. The understanding of this primary reality compels man, by moving on this divine path, to recover his footing and to attain .perfection in harmony with the rest of existence

The messengers of God bore the terrible tribulations that were directed at them with patience and fortitude so that, by passing on God's

message, they could faithfully discharge the duty of ensuring the felicity of mankind .that had been placed on their shoulders by the Creator

Thereafter, for the salvation of their communities from the grip of spiritual malaise in an environment where the foundations of spirituality and morality were crumbling and which had dragged mankind down from their true and noble state, they were commanded to educate their people and make them aware of their potential. They informed them that throughout the life of this world, man is in constant danger of lapsing into error, so he should strive towards the source of goodness and felicity, and .distance himself from his previous conduct and reform himself

The Prophets did not expect any recompense for their efforts in combating the corruption in their societies, not even a word of thanks. They all stated, "Our recompense is with God, the Lord of the universe". It is here that the excellence of .their personalities and their selfless characters can be clearly appreciated

Amongst the other objectives of the Prophets was to controvert the worship of power

and excessive selfishness and to transform the minds of individuals so that they could work continuously to become free of their shackles. In this way, people could gather their strength and work together to create for themselves a meaningful destiny, because in the course of history, irreparable damage and loss has been caused to .humanity by selfish and power hungry men

The message of the verses of Surat ul Shu'ara' is that those

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arrogant, selfish and rebellious communities who knowingly turned away from the path of salvation, and obstinately persisted in their vain ways were seized by God's punishment and retribution and were obliterated from the pages of existence; these were communities who opposed the Prophets of God with impudence and ignored .their advice and rejected the Divine message with satanic impunity

For this reason, day by day their lives grew bleaker and the dossier of their transgressions grew longer until they closed all the doors of return behind them, so that no hope for their rehabilitation remained and no more respite to purify their souls and gain a reprieve from God's punishment was available. They had easily given up the opportunities that had been granted to them and had now become enmeshed in a trap of their own making; a trap that was only filled with Divine punishment and .retribution

After every mention in this chapter of the ignominious end and destruction of a rebellious nation, the Qur'an closes the account by recounting God's attribute of might and power ('aziz), but also immediately adds the attribute of mercy (rahim). From a cursory glance at the verse it would appear that the mercy of God has nothing to do with His punishment, and it might be more appropriate to cite the attribute of .vengeance or anger or omnipotence of God

To appreciate the wisdom hidden in the verse we must first review the lives of the Prophets of God; those who had access to the richest and

greatest source of information and knowledge, so that we can understand how their .elevated spiritual station is achieved

One of the ways by which the Prophets (A) were raised in station was by their resistance against the perversion, disbelief and obstinacy of their communities, which caused them a great deal of spiritual distress. Those messengers who were more resolute in the face of ordeals and tribulations rose higher in station in God's .estimation

Consider Prophet Nuh (A), who lived in the farthest reaches of history; he spent ٩٥٠ years of his thousand year life in propagating God's religion. His was a constant, difficult and long struggle. He tirelessly battled against the idolatry and the foolish behaviour of his fatuous community. Without losing his temper he ceaselessly tried to .lead them to the truth by imparting spiritual teaching

During these long years, this great Prophet (A) had no helper and support except his reliance on God, yet nothing could stop his efforts and determination to guide his people in the different facets of their lives. He did not show any reservations in discharging his responsibilities and propagating his mission; he never hesitated in plainly stating his message to a hostile and ignorant audience. Despite all his long endeavours, he did not receive a positive reply from his nation; instead the people of this ignorant and morally decadent society persisted in their rejection and fanatically .pursued their practice of polytheism

This Prophet of God continued with all this sincere effort for a prolonged time, despite the

relentless strain on his spirit, in the aspiration that he would be able to get through to his rebellious people and reform their corrupt ways, but these hopes never materialized. Instead, as time went by, their defiance and disrespect only increased,

and they sank ever deeper into the swamp of ignorance and immorality. Finally, towards the end of his life, when he lost all hope that his people would ever change, .he cursed them

Other Prophets (A) had similar experiences with their people, (forbearance and resoluteness in the face of the defiance of their nation and their refusal to accept the .(Divine message, until they would completely lose hope

In the main, after passing through the three stages mentioned below, Prophets (A) would finally imprecate their communities, who had resolved to continue in their disbelief and totally given their lives over to Satan. The Prophets would finally pray to :God to send down His punishment on them

Great patience and fortitude in the face of disbelief, obstinacy and insults of their .۱ .people

.They would show the kind of forbearance that an ordinary person could not exhibit .۲

Despair and total loss of hope in the reformation of their people, after continuous .۳ efforts to guide them. When all their efforts and ideas have been in vain and the .people persist in their disobedience of God's message

When the polytheists would persistently challenge them to bring about God's .۴ .punishment

Only when these stages had been crossed, would the Prophets (A) [legitimately] seek God's avengement and

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retribution. In the account of Prophet Yunus (A) we read that he did not exhibit sufficient patience and forbearance. When his efforts at guiding his people were met with ignorant derision and rejection and they persisted with their misguided rituals, he lost patience with them and before he was convinced that there was no more he .could do with them, he resorted to invoking God's punishment on them

Due to his hasty despair and lack of the necessary perseverance in discharging his duties, God cast him into the belly of the whale and severely censured him to make him realize that, in the course of carrying out his mission, if he had to face frustration, defeat and even torture, he should resolutely see his mission through and stay in :place. The Qur'an states that other Prophets had this steadfastness

وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِدْرِيسَ وَذَا الْكِفْلِ كُلٌّ مِّنَ الصَّابِرِينَ

And Ismail and Idris and Zulkifl; all were of the patient ones [when delivering their (messages]. (al-Anbiya', ۲۱/۸۵

In the end, when the community of Yunus (A) witnessed the signs of God's wrath, they were overcome with abject fear and helplessness, and realized their error just in time. They became remorseful at their previous sinful conduct and fell on their knees begging for God's forgiveness and sincerely pleaded with Him to lift away His impending punishment. God accepted their appeal and forgave then and rescinded .his punishment

From this episode we clearly see how, in the face of the defiance and disobedience of mankind, God patiently keeps the

.doors of His mercy constantly open for man to enter through

It is true that the mercy and grace of God is universal and widespread, but this does not negate the possibility of punishment and retribution. The mercy and endless blessings of God must not be misunderstood to mean that in His sacred presence, the .virtuous and the evil, the oppressed and the oppressors are equal

If God, the Most High, whose dominion prevails over every ruler and who has complete authority over every defiant tyrant does not punish disobedience, and humiliate every transgressor, and overlook the conduct of every corrupt individual, then justice and accountability will lose its meaning. Should God give sanctuary to the oppressors and deal with them mercifully? Is not the fire of hell the fairest requital

for the defiant sinner? And finally, it is the essence of justice that an atom's weight if good or an atom's weight of evil should not be overlooked.

One of the clear manifestations of God's omnipotence and mercy over His ungrateful and disobedient servants is that after the coming of the Prophet of Islam (S), He has stopped visiting retribution in the earth and postponed it to the day of Judgement. In fact, even in the case of the Masih (A), that great Prophet who was the "spirit of God", who was subjected to a variety of tribulations and finally marked for death, God did not punish the perpetrators in this world and reserved the punishment for their defiance and disobedience for

the day of judgement.

Historians have acknowledged that in the early days of his prophethood, his people persecuted the great Prophet of Islam (S) – the Prophet who was the Mercy to the worlds (rahmatun li'l 'alamin) – mercilessly and sabotaged his activities under different pretexts and tried to subvert his mission by sending ruffians and troublemakers to heckle and harangue him; in short, they spared no effort to harass him, belie him and defame his noble character. Throughout all this, he maintained his composure and exhibited tremendous patience. God also gave these oppressors respite and did not send down His punishment on them in this world.

By studying all the matters discussed above, and keeping in mind the events that have occurred throughout the long course of history, we discover that the communities who were caught up in God's retribution in this world usually lived in cities with very limited populations. After the followers of the Prophets left the scene where the punishment was to come, so that they would remain immune from God's wrath, we may say that the remainder, who were comprised of the corrupt, defiant and disbelieving individuals of the community, were relatively few.

In other words, those who were destroyed by God's punishment during the entire history of the ancient Prophets, which comprised thousands of years, were a very

small number of individuals compared to for example, the casualties and extensive bloodshed that has occurred in various wars in the world, or that nowadays are caused by countries

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seeking power, or even for no apparent reason at all, where scores of people are .killed

In our time, we are witnessing widespread outbreaks of carnage in various corners of the globe due to the selfish oppression of weaker nations; every one of these wars is .a testament to the crimes of individuals who have hunger for power

This is while God's retributions and punishment of the defiant in the past – even though in a small region, and to preserve human values and to remove oppressors who were not prepared to obey God's directives at any cost, had already come down. In addition to punishing the guilty it was a warning and a lesson for others, which has .stopped many from continuing on the path of the arrogant and the degenerate

The fact is that from all wars, whose real motives have been to satisfy the selfishness of warmongering individuals, and which have no purpose except gaining power, one cannot expect any positive outcome; certainly not an outcome that would engender an environment in which piety and goodness would flourish and which would bring about enlightenment and virtue. In fact these kinds of wars only bring in their wake misery and corruption, and the resulting hardship and difficulties for the civil .population should not be ignored

On the other hand, if those who turned their back on the truth and denied themselves the protection of the true sanctuary, immediately received the retribution for their actions and the whip of death and doom came

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down on them at once and this practice was established for the unbelievers and sinners in this world, and God did not delay their punishment only until the day of

?judgement, what then would become of mankind

Now let us take into account various factors of the modern age, such as the increase in the number of cities and the population of the world, the speed of communication, the ease with which the teachings of the Prophet (S) can be disseminated and the duty of making the message of Islam reach all corners of the world, even while most nations are steeped in atheism and corruption, or in other words, immersed in the modern version of idolatry where the arrogant and their disciples assume a hostile stance against God, which is an unforgivable insolence. Now in such an environment, which is full of widespread mischief and lack of restraint, if God was to decide to manifest His wrath and to punish those who were culpable in this very world, a great multitude of the world's population would be destroyed and annihilated from the .pages of existence

Next let us bring to mind the limitless power of God, in front of which the limited and temporary power of every imperious ruler in the world pales into insignificance, a power which cannot be counted or quantified, and the whole grand universe exists due to a negligible fraction of the power, ability and greatness of the Creator and due to His will. This power is

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.reflected in the mirror of existence that illuminates every atom in the cosmos

The chief of the believers, Ali (A) has said, "O Allah! We cannot aspire to know the real extent of Your greatness ... We see Your creation and wonder over it because of Your might, and describe it as (a result of) Your great authority; whereas what is hidden (from us...is far greater.(۱

At no time or place, in the past or present, has it ever been seen that a powerful ruler, dominant over all affairs in his personal domain – not out of social or political considerations or for seeking fame, but only because of a sincere affection and the love of mankind which is ingrained in his character – always acts in a humanitarian and moral manner and overlooks the insubordination and defiance of his opponents

who are under his power; in fact he goes so far as to treat those who oppose and defy him with clemency and envelop them with his affection without expecting any positive reaction from them. History cannot present any powerful ruler, throughout the ages, with such characteristics, although the issue of the reign of the Prophets of God are .special cases which we are not considering at this time

Therefore the two attributes of “power” and “mercy” can never be united in .oppressive rulers

It is here that we should ponder deeply so that we can properly appreciate the enormity of the manifestation of ‘aziz and rahim, these two attributes of God, towards mankind. We need

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Nahj al-Balagha, sermon ۱۶۰ -۱

to become more and more familiar with His power and mercy, especially towards those who dare to be disobedient and sinful and defiant in front of His Grandeur; one way to understand this is to ponder over His repeated emphasis in all the foregoing verses, of these two of His great attributes. We thus realise that true Power and ,Mercy belongs to God alone. Indeed

وَإِنَّ رَبَّکَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

(And most surely your Lord is the Mighty, the Merciful. (al-Shu‘ara’, ۲۶/۶۸

A Bounty in the Hearts of Mountains

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاء مَاء فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُّخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ بِيضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُّخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَغَرَابِيبُ سُودٌ

Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the sky, then We bring forth therewith fruits of various colours; and in the mountains are streaks (۱), white and (red, of various hues and (others) intensely black? (al-Fatir, ۳۵/۲۷

In the Qur’an, the descriptions of the wondrous macrocosm designed by the Creator

have been mainly divided into two. The first is the explanation of the intricate system of creation and the existence of awe-inspiring phenomena, the endless marvels of .which man witnesses throughout the vast expanse of nature

For those whose personal beliefs are underpinned by a Divine worldview and who regard the universe as having been originated by the intelligent design and perfect wisdom of a Creator, every moment provides an opportunity to contemplate over an aspect of existence, and gather important lessons from its structure and organization. In this manner, they clearly perceive the glory and

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According to the author of the lexicon, "Mu'jam al-Wasit", the word "al-jadad" - ۱ refers to a portion of an object whose colour is different from the surrounding, and .this meaning is more consistent with our discussion. Mu'jam al-Wasit, ۱/۱۱۰

.radiance and the wise hand that has elegantly penned the pages of existence

The second is the account of the dazzling realities that lie beyond the natural world, which are remote from the complex mechanism of the material realm and possess expansive horizons which are not subject to the conventional principles and laws that we are used to. As a result, our perception and understanding of the mysteries of the latent aspects of existence is naturally limited and in fact, the knowledge of mankind is like an insignificant drop in front of a vast ocean when it comes to the unknown and .secret elements of the non-material world

Qur'anic exegetes have commented on this second type of wonder at some length, although in truth, no amount of deliberation about these mysteries – even if one manages to pierce the veils that shroud them – can illuminate more than a small portion of the happenings in the world beyond. This is because, as indicated earlier, the entire realm of existence is far more vast and expansive than this natural world, and within it, the non material world is far richer and more extensive than the material world and due to their intrinsic limitations, the scientific tools at the disposal of .mankind are not powerful enough to study and analyze most of these matters

However, even in the particular case of the phenomena perceived in the natural world, we can conduct our research and attempt to determine the facts in two ways; one is to

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interpret the Qur’anic verses in the light of modern knowledge and to analyze the various natural orders (animals, vegetation, inanimate matter, etc.) and compare scientific findings with the Qur’anic accounts to conclusively demonstrate that there is no discordance or contradiction in the two, and that reason and intellect also confirm the word of God.

We should bear in mind that although scientific knowledge provides the illumination that has solved some mysteries, it is not capable of dispelling all the secrets in creation. (Of course, one should not compare the knowledge derived from the Qur’an with scientific hypotheses, because science is based on experiments and research, and theorems based on experimentation are shaky and unreliable, and throughout its history scientific principles have been subjected to amendments and then the old notions filed away. In fact the Qur’an, which has an eternal hue, and is remote from every uncertainty, should be the first point of reference, against which the validity of scientific discoveries should be judged.)

Secondly, in relation to these wonders of the natural world and when studying the various creations that make up existence, we must also keep in mind the prevailing circumstances at the time of the revelation of the Qur’an, and the capacity of the audience in those days. We need to consider the level of ability, technology and understanding of the people who lived in that era, and who did not generally possess the means to investigate some of the more obscure unexplored and unknown matters of creation. And

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through this we come to realize the extent of the miracle of the noble Prophet (S).

And in fact, about the verse under consideration, the major focus of our research is of :the second type, as we will now explain

Mines containing multihued precious gemstones are substantial sources of income for the countries that possess these valuable treasures. These stones of various colours are stored in the depths of mountains in particular locations around the world and are extracted by a variety of tools and skilful processes. Thereafter, they are exported all over the world bringing much wealth and importance to the countries which produce .them

Although mines containing precious gemstones are found and excavated in most countries, however the number of rich mines in countries such as Iran, Italy, China, South Korea, India and Portugal are more abundant than in other locations. The primary colours of the stones are white, black and red, while other colours can be .considered as secondary

In the verse under consideration, the Qur'an describes the primary colours of the :stones found in mines all over the world, as well as mentioning the secondary colours

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاء مَاء فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُّخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ بِيضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُّخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَغَرَابِيبُ سُودٌ

Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the cloud, then We bring forth therewith fruits of various colours; and in the mountains are streaks, white and red, of (various hues and (others) intensely black? (al-Fatir, ۳۵/۲۷

If the facts contained in the

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verse above have not come from the Creator of the mines – the Almighty Creator who has created every atom in the universe and who possesses comprehensive and direct ?knowledge of every part of existence – where else could it have come from

The noble Prophet (S) passed his blessed life in the cities of Makka and Madina, and only undertook two short journeys away from the Arab peninsula; once in his

childhood when he accompanied his uncle who had taken a caravan to Syria, and another time in his twenties, when he conducted business as an agent of Khadija, .once again to Syria

As for the various mines that contain precious stones of various hues, which nowadays are considered as part of the national treasures of countries and which provide benefit to nations, they are only found in a handful of other countries, and not in Syria. Furthermore, they are found deep in the bowels of mountains, so how could the Prophet (S) have known of their existence and nature from any other source of ?information

Would it be possible for an ordinary person, who did not possess insight or any spiritual connection with the source of all existence and who could not display any miracle and who had no access to revelation, to possess such knowledge in those days? And was the fact that he did possess this knowledge not a proof that he was connected to the Originator of creation and received revelation from Him? In fact, in those

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days people did not generally spend much time in contemplating about the mysteries of nature or trying to uncover the innumerable secrets of the various materials and .creatures in the world

In those days which human being possessed this solid and well-rounded knowledge where he was not only aware of the existence of these mines, but also spoke of future generations who would extract precious stones (which have been enumerated alongside the rainwater as one the bounties of God) from these mines which were ?hidden deep in the depths of mountains

Aside from the eloquent nature of the verse above, which might have an outward similarity with other literary works, it possesses a unique distinctiveness and undeniable majesty that makes it transcend the reach of human endeavour. The verse mentions two bounties and their intimate connection with the life of man; one is

.the bounty of vegetation and the other is the bounty of inorganic materials

Vegetation in the form of colourful fruits and some grains which have been mentioned at the beginning of the verse ensures man's nutritional needs and strengthens his body, while the second bounty, that of mountain ranges, provide the raw materials from which man can build a shelter for himself. In truth, the Qur'an mentions these two bounties and draws the attention of man to these two sources of .his most basic and fundamental needs, food and shelter

The wise Creator created the surface rocks for man to use while he had not yet advanced past the scientifically

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stagnant period of history, while He had kept more variegated gemstones for human beings to use when their civilizations flourished and their knowledge developed so they may harness these better materials to construct modern types of buildings. We know that in ancient times, people did not have access to (many) multicoloured stones .to use in their constructions

In those days, most of the rocks that were used by the people were of the poor variety commonly found in all mountain ranges across the world, which were easily accessible to all. They would use these rocks to lay down the foundations of their houses, or occasionally to line the roofs of their buildings. It is in more recent times that man has acquired the skills and developed the equipment and modern machinery to successfully extract precious stones from the deep recesses of mountains and put .them to use in various constructions

:In the next verse, God states

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالدَّوَابِّ وَالْأَنْعَامِ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ كَذَلِكَ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاء إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ

And of men and beasts and cattle are diverse colours, likewise; only those of His servants who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah; indeed Allah is Mighty, (Forgiving. (al-Fatir, ۳۵/۲۸

Apart from the colours of objects and the stones inside mountains, in this verse God mentions the diverse colours found amongst human beings, who are fair and dark-skinned; and about animals also, there is a mention of the expansive palette of .colours that they exhibit

As we have seen, the Qur'an clearly alludes

to the wide variety of colours found throughout the mineral, plant, animal and human kingdoms and opens a door of enquiry so that everyone can can look into nature and its processes and marvel at the intricate system that is behind even the minutest .particles in the vast fabric of existence

The Qur'an declares that these wonders of creation, each of which is a sign of the endless knowledge and grandeur and power of God Almighty, can only be truly appreciated by those who possess intellect – those whose minds are illuminated by the light of insight, wisdom and mature vision – who realize that the grand construction and system of the universe with all its splendour is but an insignificant manifestation of His power and capability. They consider the entirety of the pages of the book of creation to be a testimony to the influence of the design and supreme .intellect that is behind its creation

Indeed! Those who possess insight and intellect, when they witness the wondrous design and aim and programming and far-reaching wisdom that is evident in the world around them and in the celestial bodies and in the heart of atoms and stones and in every aspect of the universe, from the smallest to the biggest object, they are irresistibly drawn to the limitless perfection of the Creator and they constantly hasten .towards Him with eagerness, fervour and perfect faith

The explanation and exegesis of this verse demonstrates another example of the miracle of God's speech, which has

.not been considered by the great exegetes in their works

Resurrection from the Sleep of Death

خُشَّعًا أَبْصَارُهُمْ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ كَأَنَّهُمْ جَرَادٌ مُّنتَشِرٌ

Their eyes cast down, going forth from their graves as if they were scattered locusts. ((al-Qamar, ۵۴/۷

Metaphors and similes are effective rhetorical devices used in literature to eloquently convey the intended meaning. Three aspects make up every simile: the first entity, the second entity (which is being compared to the first) and the similitude between the two. However, the important point in order to appreciate the eloquence of the speaker or the skill employed in constructing the imagery contained in the phrase is to understand the similitude correctly, because the reason for using the simile to convey .the intended meaning is embedded in the type of similitude that has been used

Especially in the case of Divine revelation and the Qur'anic verses, which are precise and full of meaning, it is important to ponder more carefully about the various aspects of similarity between the two objects which are being used in a simile, in order to uncover even more of the fascinating secrets contained in God's words and to enable man to imbibe from the limitless oceans of God's knowledge to the extent of his own .capacity

In their exegesis of this verse, the eminent commentators of the Qur'an have explained that the basis of the similitude is the swarming of mankind out their graves and scattering out into the plains of the place of gathering (mahshar), because of the momentous advent of the

day of Judgement. That explosive event will be heralded by the destruction of the universe and the abrupt collapse of the cosmic order and the emergence of mankind from their graves. It will be such a terrifying and dreadful event that men will scatter in confusion and disperse aimlessly just like locusts when they swarm out of their

.larvae. They will begin to move, but not consciously towards any destination

The commentators have correctly explained the usage of this simile based on the description (muntashir) which comes at the end of the verse, and have painted a picture of the extraordinary state of confusion and terror that will prevail upon mankind on that day, when every order that is familiar to them will have been transformed; nevertheless, it would be better not to confine the discussion to just this one aspect of the similitude, but to explore the meaning of its other aspects also. This would allow us to better understand the object of the verse, which is to describe the .astonishing scenes of the great day of judgement

There is no doubt that one day the present order in the cosmos will undergo a tumultuous upheaval, and following a cataclysmic event, it will be brought to an abrupt end. Not only shall the earth be subjected to convulsion and turmoil, but the stars will also die and the galaxies will break up and fall silent; in other words, that universal explosion will devastate the heavens and the earth simultaneously, and the

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prevailing system and order in creation will be completely transformed, bringing an .end to the life of the universe and its inhabitants and the annals of created beings

Indeed, this total annihilation of the cosmos, in which no single creation will be identifiable, is the inevitable future of our world. Then, graves will be upturned, and the earth, in obedience to the directive of its Lord, shall reveal the age-old contents .and secrets that she had hidden in her bosom, and lighten her burden

If man looks at the constitution of his own body, which is made up of various elements found in the earth and water, he will realize that this body will one day be absorbed into the earth and provide sustenance for fruits and plants and thus be dissipated all over the world; or his molecules might be ultimately shaped into drops of water that .find place in the vast oceans

The elements that make up our bodies are the result of changes that have occurred

under a special set of causes and conditions; not only does the body of every human being reach its form through the same procedure, but when it decomposes and decays into atoms at the end of its life, it once more becomes sustenance available to other life forms. And in this way the constituent elements of one body are preserved, even while transmuted, in the world. Therefore the idea of a renewal of life after .death is not difficult for man to picture

Why

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should it not be possible to rejoin these scattered substances, which have been dispersed to every remote corner, by gathering them all from the embrace of the earth and the clutches of the winds, and bring them together in a new form and shape? In fact, at the beginning of its creation, the same thing had occurred, and in .the same manner

This was a glance at one aspect of the astonishing and abiding greatness of God .regarding the arrival of the day of judgement

However, it seems that what is more important and arresting in the simile used in the verse above describing the dispersal and thronging of mankind on the day of gathering (mashhar), is their emergence from their graves which resembles the .swarming of locusts out of the ground

The beginning of the verse alludes to this also. Human beings lie in the earth after death for an interval, waiting for the command of God to bring the dead back to life .and to emerge from the graves

This will occur after the second blowing of the trumpet and the piercing shout, which will envelop the entirety of creation and immediately bring humanity back to life and out of their graves. Similarly, locust larvae lie dormant and buried in the earth just like the dead. The pregnant locusts insert their bodies into the ground and lay their eggs deep in the earth and then secret a liquid over the eggs to cover them. This liquid

protects them from the elements

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.and in fact, forms a temporary tomb for them

The larva capsule of the locust remains inert in the ground just like a dead corpse in the tomb that has been prepared for it to be buried in; although it possesses a very thin and delicate wall, the wall is sufficient to protect the larva for the necessary time. In fact, it is just like the shroud (kafan) that has been wrapped around the body of a .dead person

During the autumn and winter months, the larvae remain motionless and then, when spring comes, they open up to release the locust within. The insects are now ready to bring to an end their waiting (barzakh) and to leave their tombs. After emerging out of .the ground, according to certain factors and circumstances, they take to flight

Indeed, the situation with dead humans is the very same. The various parts of the human body that have decomposed into the earth are changed like everything else, according to the laws of nature. By the will of God, they will become enlivened at the advent of the day of judgement, and just like the newly hatched locusts, they shall emerge from their graves and hurry to the appointed meeting place of mahshar. They would display their original features which were shrouded and hidden; once more the .human being would have his essential being restored in a new form

The simile employed by the Qur'an is possible the most accurate and subtle similitude in this regard, and can be

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readily understood and perceived by every individual. The verse clearly portrays the .state of man when he is restored to life

God informs his servants and advises them to observe the newly-hatched locusts as they emerge from their tombs in the earth, and then bring to mind the beginning of

their own new lives when they will also come out of the earth. In this manner they will be convinced that this event will certainly come to pass and that their own fate will unfold in the same manner and that that day is waiting for him.

Man's constitution can accept various changes but he will not accept that the kernel of his being should become non-existent. Through this example, he will see that just like other bodies, the characteristics of his constitution are lost but nothing is lessened from his essence. In fact, his essence and ego remain conscious and indestructible throughout all his evolution, until the day of his final reckoning arrives.

According to the views stated above and through the use of such an elegant simile, one can translate the verse under study as follows: "They go forth from the graves like locusts and are scattered on the plains of the gathering-place (mahshar).", contrary to the usual translations which state, "They go forth from their graves, and like locusts are scattered on the plains of the gathering-place (mahshar)." (۱)

The Wise Counsel of Luqman

وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَانُ لِابْنِهِ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ

when Luqman said to his son

۱- In the science of rhetoric ('ilm al-ma'ani), there is a discussion about negation (salb) and affirmation (ijab) in a sentence; if the similitude in a simile is positive (affirmative simile), then it applies to both the adjective and the noun of the simile. Now in the verse under discussion, the word jirad (locusts) has been described by the adjective muntashir (scattered), therefore the similitude which is the "emergence

.from graves" applies to both muntashir as well as jirad

while he admonished him: O my son! do not associate aught with Allah; most surely (polytheism is a grievous iniquity (Luqman, ٣١/١٣

Human life is governed by a system of personal responsibility. Duties begin from the earliest stages of life and continue till its end; at no moment can an individual claim freedom or separation from some form of obligation. As long as ability exists, it has an associated responsibility attached to it, and only when death finally catches up with a .person, it brings to a close the roster of his duties also

Generally, the sense of responsibility is based on intellectual principles, and the reasons for abiding by the laws of religion also go back to these same principles. This is because, in societal affairs as well as personal life, religious laws and directives conform to the general perception of the intellect. As an individual's understanding and awareness deepens, his desire and readiness to discharge his responsibilities will increase and intensify, because awareness of ones responsibilities and obligations is .an essential prerequisite for the felicity of mankind

The effect of conduct and actions is far greater than that of conversation and speech; the personal qualities of a teacher and the manner of his behaviour have a great and fundamental impact on his students. Practical training by example has a crucial effect on the minds of those being nurtured, and influences their character to an extent that .cannot be compared to mere literal and verbal exhortation

When an individual wants to become a

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mentor and oversee the spiritual and moral training of others, even if uses the most advanced techniques of teaching, he still needs to have exemplary personal qualities so that he can create a suitable environment for nurturing excellence. He must be able to transfer the wealth of God-wariness (taqwa) into the confines of minds and thoughts so that he can bring about an internal revolution in his charges, the most

important of which is to foster the virtues of sincerity (ikhlas) and safeguarding their .minds from corruption

One who seeks success in nurturing, must himself display impeccable virtue and moral conduct, so that his words and advice have the desired effect; otherwise, if he is lax in performing his own duties, it is obvious that his efforts at nurturing others will be in vain. This is especially the case when his actions and manners are closely .observed by the students who then find his words inconsistent with his acts

When a mentor's inner self is devoid of taqwa of the all-Creator and he himself does not lead a virtuous life, people will evaluate and judge him and find his conduct wanting, and consequently common trust in him will be shaken and weakened. People will not then be prepared to accept him as a guide and role model in order to achieve .moral excellence

In the verses under discussion, through a series of his recommendations and sagacious counsel, we are introduced to the wisdom of Luqman, who had access to the ultimate source of knowledge and

information. His radiant face was familiar and famous amongst his people; and the best utterances and insights of the day could not match even excerpts of his .statements

This learned sage turns his attention to the moral training of his son with particular care and creativeness. He addresses his son by giving him beneficial advice, and by explaining to him the correct course and the nature of his duties. He shows him how to lead a noble life, through which the maxims of spiritual and moral values can best be .experienced

In the beginning, in order to motivate his son, to energise the intuitive truths latent in him and to guide him towards his ultimate goal, he clearly sets out for him his duties towards his Creator and reminds him of God's unity. This is to illuminate his mind and

insight so that he becomes able to prevent himself from deviating from the path of monotheism (tawhid) and straying into polytheism (shirk). Therefore, he counsels him :in the following words

وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَانُ لِابْنِهِ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ {O} وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَى وَهْنٍ وَفِصَالُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ

And when Luqman said to his son while he admonished him: O my son! Do not associate aught with Allah; most surely polytheism is a grievous iniquity. And We have enjoined upon man concerning his parents - His mother bears him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two

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years - Give thanks unto Me and unto your parents. Unto Me is the journeying. ((Luqman, ۳۱/۱۳-۱۴

In the first verse, mention is made of how Luqman draws his son's attention to this exalted truth so that he would not digress into the swamp of error, but rather discover that behind the apparent world and the intricate complexity of creation, there exists a single unique Power who has originated the system of the universe and who controls and regulates it according to an elaborate scheme and an all-knowing intention and purpose. Therefore, only such a sublime existence deserves to be worshipped. In this regard, he must fulfil his duty towards this Eternal, Needless Being and continually .express his thanks and gratitude to Him

In the second verse, the words of Luqman are cut off, and his silence here raises a question: why did Luqman stop talking at this point? After explaining to his son his responsibilities towards his Lord, it was necessary next to outline his duties towards his parents so that he could properly discharge his responsibilities to his mother and .father

It seems that the reason why Luqman became silent at this juncture and did not elaborate upon the duties of a child towards its father and mother is contained in the

subtle point that in this case, it was Luqman himself who was the father. If he brought up the subject of filial obligations, which included politeness, respect and gratitude to the father, it would be as if he was

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requesting his son to display this behaviour to him personally. It would be tantamount to asking his son to repay him for all his efforts and guidance throughout his childhood and later years, to obey his directives and to never forget his favours.

The speech of a distinguished and wise man like Luqman, who had gathered within his personality so many diverse virtues, cannot be interpreted in this manner, and in truth, it would be an injustice to his station to do so. Secondly, by himself reminding his son of his filial responsibility Luqman is in fact pointing out to his son's his obligation and indebtedness to himself, an act which does not befit a man who has attained such a high spiritual station.

By considering this subtle and significant matter of courtesy, we can understand the reason why Luqman stops speaking at this point, and through his meaningful silence, appreciate his exemplary moral qualities. As Luqman falls silent and refrains from mentioning the filial responsibilities of a child, Divine revelation takes over and instructs mankind about the rights of parents.

Naturally, Luqman's son is also obliged to toil his utmost to fulfil his duty towards his father and mother in obedience to the command of God. Once more, Luqman begins to speak and continues to counsel his son, this time advising him about his duties toward his fellow members of society:

يَا بُنَىَّ أَقِمِ الصَّلَاهَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَانْهَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَاصْبِرْ عَلَى مَا أَصَابَكَ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ {۵} وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ

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خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِى الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ

O my son! Keep up prayer and enjoin the good and forbid the evil, and bear patiently

that which befalls you; indeed these acts require courage; and do not turn your face away from people in contempt, nor go about in the land exulting overmuch; surely (God does not love any self-conceited boaster. (Luqman, ۳۱/۱۷-۱۸

In this part of his speech Luqman advises his son about the fundamental external traits which he should adopt so that he may preserve himself from corrupting his soul; in the same way, from amongst the many inner moral vices, he singles out one. He admonishes his son, who is about to enter and participate in society, to beware of behaving with conceit, which would be an outward manifestation of the negative aspects of his personality, and it would have far-reaching consequences. If arrogance becomes part of an individual's character it will affect every aspect of his personal and social interactions, inevitably resulting in his downfall and disgrace in the .society

In addition, arrogance always results in an adverse reaction from the people and opens the door to general dislike towards the conceited individual. This backlash makes societal life difficult for everyone and thus, it was necessary that Luqman's son took his father's advice seriously and avoided that which, in his father's wise judgement, was against the moral code of society life, and which make it difficult to form sound relationships with his fellow

citizens. He must realize that selfishness and egotism only lead to loss, and is never the desirable course; moreover, God detests arrogant behaviour, Finally, selfishness is a factor which stunts man's spiritual progress and becomes an obstacle in his .journey to the proximity of God

Thereafter, Luqman counsels his son to inculcate in himself righteous traits, and purify his soul from that which would corrupt it, as this was the only way to ultimate :felicity and salvation. He urges him to always adopt moderation in his conduct, saying

وَاقْصِدْ فِی مَشْیِکَ وَاغْضُضْ مِن صَوْتِکَ إِنَّ أَنکَرَ الْأَصْوَاتِ لَصَوْتُ الْحَمِیرِ

And pursue the middle course in your going about and lower your voice; surely the (most hateful of voices is braying of the asses. (Luqman, ۳۱/۱۹

The Expansive Earth

وَالأَرْضَ فَرَشْنَاهَا فَنِعْمَ الْمَاهِدُونَ

And the earth, We have made it a wide extent; how well have We then spread (it) out. ((al-Dhariyat, ۵۱/۴۷

وَالأَرْضَ مَدَدْنَاهَا وَأَلْقَيْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ وَأَنبَتْنَا فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مَّوْزُونٍ {٥} وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَايِشَ وَمَن لَّسْتُمْ لَهُ بِرَازِقِينَ

And the earth - We have spread it forth and made in it firm mountains and caused to grow in it of every suitable thing. And We have made in it means of subsistence for (you and for him whom you cannot sustain. (al-Hijr, ۱۵/۱۸-۱۹

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا {٥} أَحْيَاء وَأَمْوَاتًا

Have We not made the earth to draw together to itself; (prepared for) the living and (the dead? (al-Mursalat, ۷۷/۲۵-۲۶

One of the branches of the ever-increasing knowledge of mankind in contemporary times is the methodology of

exploiting the earth’s natural resources and God-given treasures. Scientists have always been apprehensive that unplanned tapping of the existing resources would engender problems for future generations. For this reason, elaborate and extensive programs and projects have been designed by experts to optimally utilize the natural resources, which are an influential factor in the determination of the wellbeing of .human societies

Many conferences have been held to discuss the soundest way to exploit these natural resources, so that adequate attention is paid to the fundamental and vital

needs of humanity as well as ensuring that these needs are met in a balanced and equitable manner. No scientist will endorse the principle that each individual is free to exploit nature in a manner that is to his sole and limitless advantage.

However, God, the All-wise – whose wisdom is barely reflected by the entirety of man's knowledge – had also made arrangements for this important issue at the time of the creation of the earth; indeed this is a proof of the intelligent, knowledgeable and capable design that underpins existence. He made man aware of these blessings and invited him to make lawful use of them. Man has been required to take advantage of the Divine bounties in the earth in a thoughtful manner and not to give way to excess and overindulgence in an attempt to acquire as much as possible, which would ultimately cause a disparity between needs and consumption. If these resources are managed correctly through a system of organization

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and control, then neither scarcity will affect them nor will these plentiful resources be depleted.

In the days when the human population was not even one-third of the present number and many of the earth's resources had yet to be discovered, poverty and famine arising from ruined crops was much more common than it is today. Indigence and hunger were constant afflictions and would cause widespread death amongst human societies.

Nowadays, although the earth's population has increased manifold, those unfavourable circumstances no longer prevail (in the same abundance), even though contentment and moderation in consumption is not only less than in previous times, but has given way to wastage and shameful excesses. Furthermore, in order to balance their markets, many countries actually destroy a substantial amount of their agricultural produce annually, a fact that distresses the heart of every free-thinking individual.

Thus, poverty and scarcity arises due to the method of exploiting resources and its

disproportionate distribution – and not because of a decrease in the earth’s natural resources themselves – and consequent to the clash between demand and profiteering and the corruption that arises as a result, the social fabric and harmony is torn apart; in reality this unfair utilization of resources is due the culture of excess on the one hand, and the absence of contentment and the insatiable appetites of today’s .greedy and selfish individuals on the other

:Let us also cast a glance at the very distant past

It is not known when the earth initially acquired the capacity to

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support life and when the first living creatures appeared, developed and multiplied on it. The exact date when man walked on earth is likewise shrouded in mystery and thus far no convincing answer to this riddle has been presented by researchers. Whatever has been postulated in this regard is based on a chain of theories and suppositions .and not on any conclusive and well-accepted facts

If we consider this earth, we find that we do not know how old it is, nor do we have any method to determine its age with any certainty, and every opinion on this matter is no more than a conjecture, which does not shed much light on its past and its true nature. When historians commonly disagree about events that are just a few centuries old, what kind of theory can reliably explain an episode that occurred in the ?system of creation several million, or rather billions of years ago

We do not even know when life and subsequently, man, first appeared on earth; what we do know for certain, however, is that God has provided an abundant variety of materials for the benefit and needs of every living thing (humans, animals and .vegetation) without the least parsimoniousness

Every creature and plant can draw sustenance and nutrients for its survival and development from the earth. Since the earth is limited in size, it follows that the food it can produce is also limited. These limitations seem to indicate that the earth would be

unable to provide for

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.the needs of all its inhabitants over a prolonged period of time

This however, through an astonishingly complex and regulated system that governs this small planet – which has so many diverse and different aspects and is intricately linked to its store of resources – every living creature and plant receives its sustenance. And this has been the case from the obscure beginning of creation, and will continue till the end of time, while the resources are not exhausted or even diminished. This amazing miracle of creation is a fact that is undeniable and in this regard, the Qur'an declares that the earth has the capacity to support the entirety of :its inhabitants and satisfy their various and diverse needs

وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَايِشَ وَمَن لَّسْتُمْ لَهُ بِرَازِقِينَ

And We have made in it means of subsistence for you and for him whom you cannot (sustain. (al-Hijr, ۱۵/۱۹

And so we see a constant and continuous process in the earth which progresses in .association with a special system of controls on a pre-planned and guided course

When man desired to build houses and the supplies he needed were bricks, stone and lime, God placed these simple materials at his disposal so that he could take steps to .alleviate his basic needs and make a shelter for himself

However, nowadays, due to urban overpopulation, especially as people move into the main townships, and due to the problems associated with overcrowding and the increased communication of people with one another, man even needs buildings with more than one

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hundred storeys. In His infinite wisdom and knowledge that encompasses every particle in the universe of existence, God endowed within the earth – many millions of

years ago – the raw materials that would one day be used for construction (stone and clay and iron) in the shape of quarries and mines. He then inspired man to create and invent and made these materials accessible to him so that he may advance in the world by extracting these pre-prepared stores from the depths of the earth and utilizing them in providing for his needs.

The foregoing discussion described the adequacy of the earth's resources in catering for the needs of mankind and his fellow creatures throughout its history and for as long as life-forms exist on it and wish to make use of its provisions.

The Qur'an also emphasises this very same point, and adds that the earth not only sustains every living being, but accommodates the dead as well. (1)15

Although man's development and transformation will never evolve away from his fundamental humanness and the essence of his existence and constitution, nevertheless, in his material trappings, man has come a long way in the course of time, and this is evident across the world.

Death is the inescapable end of every living being that inhabits the earth and the earth itself is ever ready to welcome the remains of the dead in its embrace. Sooner or later, the bodies of humans go back to the earth, as do the carcasses of animals. Every variety

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1- Have We not made the earth to draw together to itself; the living and the dead (Al-Mursalat, 77/25,26)

of vegetation – from leaves to the trunks of trees – is likewise gradually assimilated into the earth's stores.

Therefore the earth is at once the main support for human life and the source from which mankind can gather bounties, as well as the burial place for all living things; thus, the Qur'an states:

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا {۵} أَحْيَاء وَأَمْوَاتًا

Have We not made the earth to draw together to itself; the living and the dead. (al-Mursalat, ۷۷/۲۵-۲۶)

That which resonates with the principles of nature is purpose and the pursuit of perfection; indeed these are the distinct and well known properties that permeate creation and are the immediate and consecutive fruits of Divine planning. Therefore, imperfection and diminution – which are the outcomes of chaos and unwise planning – have no place or meaning in the system of existence.

Thus, when we contemplate the foundations of existence, we come to realize that it abounds with splendour, grandeur and greatness. The Qur'an states in this regard:

مَّا تَرَى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَنِ مِن تَفَاوُتٍ فَارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَى مِن فُطُورٍ

You will not see any incongruity in the creation of the Beneficent Lord; then look again, can you see any disorder? (al-Mulk, ۶۷/۳)

Behind the system of creation of the all-Merciful God, one will not find inadequacy and disorderliness; carefully look again and again, do you see any flaw? No!

Therefore, indifference towards, and ignorance of the various phenomena that are manifested in the world and of what goes on around mankind, has consequences that will form obstacles to

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the ultimate felicity of humanity.

Guidance in Nature

point

وَأَلْقَى فِي الأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَن تَمِيدَ بِكُمْ وَأَنْهَارًا وَسُبُلاً لَّعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ {۵} وَعَلامَاتٍ وَبِالنَّجْمِ هُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ

And He has cast great mountains in the earth lest it might be convulsed with you, and

rivers and roads that you may go aright; and landmarks; and by the stars they find (the right way. (al-Nahl, ۱۶/۱۵-۱۶

The term "guidance" always brings to one's mind the notion of spiritual instruction and direction. However, in the case of God Almighty and His constant and widespread grace, we cannot confine this term to such a narrow sense. A study of the great organization of the cosmos and the intricate detail of our own creation makes us reach the conclusion that the system of existence is founded on a set of essential principles in which every creation and phenomenon has its particular place and role. The Creator has guided every one of His creations according to its nature and .composition and has prepared a program for every aspect and phase of its existence

It is not possible for a creature to acquire existence or reach perfection and yet be independent of God's nurturing influence; giving new life, bestowing bounties and conferring favours are amongst the distinctive prerogatives of the Creator, and the signs of this invigoration and constant bestowal and favour are clearly evident and :manifest in every creation

۱. (Existential or universal guidance (hidayat-e takwini

Muslim thinkers unanimously agree that within the scheme of creation, God guides every creature towards its physical perfection; from the smallest cell, whose internal processes

are governed by a special system, to the most magnificent phenomena in the cosmos – despite all their wonders, whenever they attain a certain station, they require and .receive the guidance reserved for that station

Indeed, everything is in utter need of Him so that not only may He allow it to achieve its inner potential, but also so that he may gently coax it along the correct direction of development through His permeating radiance. If it was not for this guidance, the entire universe would never be able to stand fast and become stable – in fact, it would .not be able to even realise a tinge of existence

(Legislative or prescriptive guidance (hidayat–e tashri’i .۲

Just as the order of life has originated from the boundless wisdom and knowledge of God, guidance about the purpose of man in the system of existence is likewise from God, because the necessary consequence of life and intellect is to have an objective and goal. Aside from the intuitive knowledge that is inherent in every human being and which assists him in recognizing certain truths so that he may freely, without any preconceptions, choose his path based on this essential inner faculty (fitra), external guidance that would strengthen and support the intellect and thefitra is also necessary. This is so that he may reform the rebellious and immoderate elements in .his temperament as well as protect his intellect and fitra from perversion

Just as God Almighty guided man to seek physical perfection through the instinct of self-interest, He likewise guided him to reach human perfection

through the agency of legislative or prescriptive directives, in addition to the guidance of the fitra. This is because when existential guidance encounters self-interest, it .requires some assistance

God appointed Prophets (A) to come to the aid of man, to take his hand and introduce him to the subtle cognitive abilities latent in his own fitra and to enliven his positive and noble inclinations and motivations and inspire him to use these faculties in the manner they were meant to be used, and point out to him all the impediments that .might obstruct his journey towards perfection

It should be noted that this guidance is a manifestation of God’s grace and a preparation to examine the worthiness of the individual and to determine the kind of reward he will earn through his actions; it is not mean to divest man of choice or the power of independent rational thought and to extinguish the radiance of his free will, rather this is the manner in which the measure of the excellences and failures of individuals is manifested. Every human being can use the internal and external Divine guidance at his disposal to ennoble his actions and ascend the ladder towards

intellectual maturity and perfection. Indeed, the path to perfection does not accept stagnation and man’s ascent will not take place until he consciously takes steps to .fundamentally transform himself

(Guidance about the needs of life (hidayat–e zisti .۳

When we look at the life forms that inhabit the world as a whole and analyse their various aspects, we find that all members of this system occupy

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a position appropriate to their specific status. And when a particular subset of the creation is subjected to the laws of nature it starts to flourish in its preordained direction. From this perspective we can clearly see the general equilibrium that exists in the world between these members of creation (in the human, animal and plant .kingdoms), all of whom possess their own intrinsic guidance

When we analyse the characteristics of animals we conclude that their natural constitutions and habitats are totally different from that of plant matter, because nature does not place their sustenance at their disposal; rather animals have to ceaselessly forage and hunt to provide food for themselves, and obviously this .necessitates the development of the appropriate tools and appendages for the task

However, man who has reached higher stations and who possesses a determined and free will, is still at a lower level when it comes to his instincts. His physical constitution is comparatively weak and poorly equipped and he is much less able to withstand physical trauma than animals; indeed, it takes him many years to become self-sufficient and able to cater for his own needs. These particular characteristics which embrace all creatures are the means to the gradual progression towards .perfection

The verse above discusses a type of guidance that helps man in his daily life, and sheds light on some of the mysterious realities of creation. God the Almighty, who is

the source of mercy, and whose grace is continually flowing throughout the cosmos, has not

neglected to create a variety of natural features and combinations of structures in the complex systems of the world which serve to guide its inhabitants during the course .of their earthly lives

The Creator of the cosmos – that grand Designer and Possessor of limitless power – has granted to His creatures special and wondrous perceptive powers and sensitivity so that they are able to live and flourish to achieve perfection. These abilities allow them to adopt the correct path in the journey that each must undertake in this world, .and guide them in the course of their amazing lives

,When Musa (A) was asked by Fir'awn to introduce his Lord, he replied

قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِی أَعْطَی کُلَّ شَیْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَی

Our Lord is He Who gave to everything its creation, then guided it (to its goal) [Ta Ha, .[۲۰/۵۰

Animals and birds have an acute sense of direction by which they accurately navigate distances. During the course of their lives, birds use this mysterious sense to easily move between their nests and remote feeding places without ever losing their way .back

The knowledge that every creature possesses is a bounty that has been placed in its essence and the majesty and grandeur of creation is amply manifested by these .wondrous abilities that we see in different creatures

Migratory birds sometimes travel across hundreds of kilometres to reach their destination, where they live for a long time before flying back along the same route .until they unerringly return to their starting point

What kind of compass do

these birds use, that is so faultless and accurate, to be able to cross vast distances, stay in foreign lands for several months and then return back to their point of origin? .Even today human science has not been able to completely unravel that mystery

Many scientists have conducted a variety of experiments to try to understand more about the sense of direction that all birds possess and they have not been able to inactivate it in an animal (even by introducing different factors to confuse it); the birds are even able to use this calculated system to produce many other wondrous (acrobatic) movements within themselves which is a product of the same unknown .system

During their migration, these birds form aerial flocks and converge from different places and sometimes change places with one another creating a beautiful and awe-inspiring pattern in flight. What instrument has been placed in their nature and constitution that allows them to fly in perfectly efficient formations without colliding ?with one another

Consider airplanes, which possess many intricate components and sensitive and advanced instruments; when they perform air manoeuvres, they could never gather and fly together in close proximity in these vast numbers and safely perform the .various manoeuvres that birds effortlessly exhibit

Often, even modern airplanes, which undergo rigorous testing and are put through planned simulations in an attempt to cope with any eventualities, have had accidents .and fatal crashes when they participated in aerial displays

Apart from birds, other animals and insects also follow established systems and exhibit

many forms of mysterious and unfathomable behaviour; to fulfil their needs they make use of astonishing locating abilities which are unique to their own species.

Animals have been blindfolded and relocated hundreds of kilometres away from their .normal habitat, and yet are amazingly able to return unerringly to their homes

:However, according to the Qur’an

وَخُلِقَ الإِنسَانُ ضَعِيفًا

(And man is created weak. (al-Nisa’, ۴/۲۷

Man is relatively weak physically and has no internal direction/location system to speak of. At the same time he possesses an efficient and creative brain and a .powerful intellect that is vastly superior to every other creature

In any case, the Divine hands fashioned natural phenomena to make up for this deficiency in human bodies, so that they would serve man as beacons and signposts .for him, and alert and protect him on his travels from possible dangers on his journey

In ancient times the mode of travelling was confined to pack animals. Often, during journeys which were undertaken across deserts and plains which were devoid of mountains and hills, travellers would lose their way and become exposed to severe perils. In many cases, they strayed into unknown trails and lost their lives as a result. However, on routes which were flanked by mountains on one side, there was less likelihood of people getting lost because they could use them mountains as a guiding .landmark to reach their destinations

The verses under study make clear that in order to compensate for the lack of an internal radar system within man – a

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system that exists in various forms in other living creatures – God prepared for man a natural system to tell direction in the shape of mountains and hills and springs and rivers and clefts inside mountains so that when man travelled in the land form one place to another, these unchanging features would serve as landmarks and signs for .him to easily plot his course of travel

Even in our times, with the advances in scientific knowledge, airplane pilots, besides relying on their electronic systems to locate their position, also use mountain ranges, .rivers and geographical features to check their course

This is one of the innumerable blessings of God and is a testimony to the various uses and benefits which these natural phenomena afford to the inhabitants of the earth according to God's plan, one of which is to guide and direct human beings. The benefits of these natural features are clearly visible when the sun shines forth warmly and brightly in the day; both the heat and the light of this magnificent heavenly body .assist the inhabitants of the earth in their movements and travels

For travel in the night also, God has created a system of stars in the heavens whose light and sparkle guide the inhabitants of the earth in the land and the seas. The system of the movement of the planets, stars, sun and moon as they follow their :ordained orbits, all serve to guide man

وَبِالنَّجْمِ هُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ

,And by the stars they find the right way. (al-Nahl

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(۱۶/۱۶

A study of the horizons and a survey of how beneficial the various natural phenomena .are for mankind is in itself a source of spiritual inspiration and knowledge about God

We know that the cosmos is never-ending and therefore knowing and understanding all of its secrets is also an infinitely difficult task; man's advancing knowledge is still unable to explain many of the mysteries behind the phenomena that have been created for him. Despite every one of these signs and systems, which can be witnessed and perceived in nature, existing in such exalted planes, they cannot be compared to the intricate and complex constitution of the human being and the human intellect. For an individual who has intelligence and insight – which are also .granted by God creative will – this matter is very instructive

The existence of these landmarks throughout one's journey from one place to another is a matter of comfort and peace of mind, and everyone can select the easiest path to reach their destination across nature's mountains, rivers and gullies. Additionally, in travelling through these natural features they may contemplate on these signs of God and analyse them; as they marvel at the many amazing sights scattered throughout the world, they can witness the power and planning of God, most High. In every single atom in the expanse of nature they will see a testimony to .the existence of the Source of creation and be thus inspired and guided

:The Qur'an states

الَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ مَهْدًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ فِيهَا

سُبُلًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

He Who made the earth a resting-place for you, and made ways in it for you so that (you may be guided aright (al-Zukhruf, ٤٣/٩

From the term "tahtadun" – guided aright – in the two previous verses, both meaning can be derived and from both we can get guidance; we benefit from mountains and rivers and natural trails in the course of our journeys and travel to our destinations without the anxiety and fear of losing our way and we also benefit from witnessing these grand and wondrous living phenomena, and through them appreciate the greater Reality and the needless, unique and omnipotent Source, Whose qualities are .dimly reflected in man himself

It is true that the understanding of a physiologist or curious scientist who examines the intricate inner workings of an animal is far removed from that of a layman who makes a simple study of the animal, however, even though both look at creation from .different angles, they come to the same conclusion

A Devastating Storm

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ جَاءَتْكُمْ جُنُودٌ فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا وَجُنُودًا لَّمْ تَرَوْهَا وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرًا
{٥} إِذْ جَاؤُوكُم مِّن فَوْقِكُمْ وَمِنْ أَسْفَلَ مِنكُمْ وَإِذْ زَاغَتْ الْأَبْصَارُ وَبَلَغَتِ الْقُلُوبُ الْحَنَاجِرَ وَتَظُنُّونَ بِاللَّهِ الظُّنُونَا {٥} هُنَالِكَ ابْتُلِيَ
الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَزُلْزِلُوا زِلْزَالًا شَدِيدًا

O you who have faith! Remember Allah's blessings upon you when the hosts came at you, and We sent against them a strong wind, and hosts whom you did not see. And God sees best what you do.

When they came at you from above and from below you [higher and lower [٣٣/١٠] ground], and when the eyes rolled (with fear), and the hearts leapt to the throats, and you entertained misgivings about Allah, [٣٣/١١] it was there that the faithful were tested and were shaken severely. (al-Ahzab, ٣٣/٩)

The lofty mission of the Prophet (S) was to convey the radiant message of God to mankind and accordingly, two of his celebrated attributes are, "a bringer of glad tidings" (bashir) and "a warner" (nadhir). However, when ignorance reaches its limit and human beings are being deprived of their freedom to decide on and select the correct course of action, and no other choice remains to counter the situation, then the use of armed conflict as a corrective measure becomes legitimate. In the face of an enemy quick to war, the Prophet (S) had to react in a similar manner; indeed, this response is natural and reasonable.

Therefore, whenever the disbelievers challenged the Muslims to war and the survival of Islam was threatened, the Prophet (S) would take steps to protect the existence of Divine values within the society and defend Islam. Most of the battles of the Prophet (S) were defensive in nature, and were fought in response to the attack of the enemy.

However, because his mission was essentially to convey God's message and to establish His unity, God favoured and assisted His Prophet (S), who was the most distinguished of His creatures. In battle against the enemy, too, the

Prophet (S) received God's aid so that he could ably shoulder the task of the guidance of humanity, and to deliver mankind from the grip of polytheism and spiritual pollution, and to convey his universal message to every corner of the world so that he could present new concepts in the shape of a comprehensive program of life. Thus, the principle of conflict and war in Islam is quite different from that in other schools of thought, because it pursues deeper and humanitarian objectives.

In Islam, resorting to armed conflict is only legitimate in order to liberate mankind in the true sense and to free minds from the captivity of doubt and every shackle that binds humanity.

In the battle of Ahzab which is partly described in the foregoing verses, the situation was such that several groups, comprising of polytheist and Jewish tribes, whose authority was threatened by the message of Islam, had been trying to divert the Prophet (S) from his mission. When all their efforts failed, they resorted to band together to wage war against the Muslims. Their alliance was made at in an environment where tribal allegiances were very strong while Islam was teaching a message that transcended such considerations.

The confederation far outmatched the Muslim army in strength and equipment, and their organized formations presented a strong wall against the forces of Islam. It is recorded that they outnumbered the Muslims three to one, which naturally was an uneven match.

In this battle, which took place around Madina, the Muslim

soldiers were in a very difficult situation due to their lack of numbers and means. Matters were proceeding in a manner that it seemed that the bigger and better equipped army was inevitably going to defeat the weaker force. The polytheists were confident that they would easily overrun the Muslim defences, deal them a crippling

.defeat and destroy the nascent establishment of Islam

Meanwhile, the hypocrites and fifth-columnists began to direct all their efforts to weaken the morale of the Muslims. They used every means to plot and inflame the situation in an attempt to stop the spread of the pervading influence of Islam, which .was threatening their age-old arrogant ways and customs

It was in these difficult times that the help of God came to the rescue of the Muslims. .In the manner described in the verses, God sent two forces to the aid of the believers

One of these forces was visible and the other invisible; the invisible force could not be seen by either party in the battle, while the visible force was clearly felt by both sides. The invisible force, which the Qur'an mentions, was that of the angels, who aided the Muslims and strengthened their morale, and allowed them to remain steadfast against their enemy. The force whose presence was felt was that of a violent storm, whose devastating effects were clear to the Muslims and the enemy alike. The storm which occurred in the battlefield and at the time of battle, was so unexpected and sudden that

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it brought disarray in the ranks of the enemy within a few moments, resulting in their .defeat

The Muslims clearly understood and realized with certainty that an invisible army of angels had come to their aid at a critical time when they were hopelessly outnumbered and facing a well-equipped enemy, because they knew that their victory was not an ordinary or foreseeable outcome; the polytheists had no such belief in angels. As for the visible assistance which was the devastating storm, its effects had been clearly perceived by both sides of the conflict. The army of Islam as well as the forces of the enemy simultaneously witnessed the sudden storm with their .own eyes

Here the Qur'an emphatically declares the storm as the cause of the enemies' defeat

and this event has been mentioned as an example of God's special blessing and grace .to the Muslim soldiers

And if such an extraordinary storm, which the idolaters themselves experienced and which brought about their complete defeat had not occurred, they would have certainly reacted angrily to, and openly challenged, the Qur'anic version of events. They would have lost no opportunity to spread propaganda against Islam and the Qur'an and would have declared everywhere that there had been no storm, and this would have been a means to crush the beliefs of the Muslims and negate the claim of .the Qur'an

However, the fact is that after the revelation of the verses, the idolaters and hypocrites who were ever searching for ways to discredit Islam, and

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would question the verses of the Qur'an at the smallest pretext, remained quiet and gave no alternative explanation for their defeat. This itself is a sign that they acknowledged the truth of the Qur'anic report; that a storm had overwhelmed the army of disbelievers and caused their humiliating defeat; that also, a storm that only raged in the small area where the two armies were arrayed, targeting only their side and laying their army to waste while sparing the other. In the end they had been .forced to abandon the field and accede to a weaker foe

It is noteworthy that the battle of Ahzab, as mentioned earlier, was instigated by a confederation of various tribes from amongst the idolaters and the Jews ; despite this, no one from the ranks of the Jews, idolaters or the hypocrites could present any .explanation contrary to the explicit and decisive account mentioned in the Qur'an

In the years that followed this event, when opponents were constantly searching for ways and means to undermine the beliefs of the Muslims, even prejudiced historians amongst them have not been able to justifiably refute the statement of the Qur'an about what actually transpired that day, and to prove that the devastating storm that the Qur'an mentions as the cause of the chaos in their army and their ultimate

unimaginable defeat, never occurred. This itself is a demonstration of the miracle of .the Qur’an, which must be pondered upon, and not passed over casually

If these hostile groups had wanted

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to move on from their dark past, and to forever put aside their legacy of baseless customs, which was an important cause of their intellectual stagnancy, and to benefit from the radiance of Divine teachings, this miraculous event which they witnessed .with their own eyes was enough

If they were willing to change, this experience would certainly make them reconsider their deviant beliefs and abandon their defiance and accept the religion which opened for man the doors to personal development, guidance and perfection, and which brought with it the keys to human prosperity. We should also take a look at the verses :of Suratu Tawba which state

يَعْتَذِرُونَ إِلَيْكُمْ إِذَا رَجَعْتُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ قُل لاَّ تَعْتَذِرُواْ لَن نُّؤْمِنَ لَكُمْ قَدْ نَبَّأَنَا اللّهُ مِنْ أَخْبَارِكُمْ وَسَيَرَى اللّهُ عَمَلَكُمْ وَرَسُولُهُ ثُمَّ تُرَدُّونَ إِلَى عَـالِمِ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَـادَةِ فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَـا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ {٥} سَـيَحْلِفُونَ بِـاللّهِ لَكُمْ إِذَا انقَلَبْتُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ لِتُعْرِضُـواْ عَنْهُمْ فَـأَعْرِضُواْ عَنْهُمْ إِنَّهُمْ رِجْسٌ وَمَـأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ جَزَاء بِمَا كَانُواْ يَكْسِـبُونَ {٥} يَحْلِفُونَ لَكُمْ لِتَرْضَوْاْ عَنْهُمْ فَـإِن تَرْضَوْاْ عَنْهُمْ فَـإِنَّ اللّهَ لاَ يَرْضَـى عَنِ الْقَوْمِ الْفَاسِقِينَ

They will offer excuses to you when you return to them. Say: Do not make excuses; we will never believe you. Allah has informed us of you state of affairs. Allah and His Apostle will observe your actions, then you shall be returned back to the Knower of the unseen and the seen, then He will inform you of what you used to do. They will swear to you by Allah when you return to them so that you may leave

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them alone. So do leave them alone. Indeed they are filth and their abode is hell; a recompense for what they used to earn. They will swear to you that you may be reconciled to them; but (even) if you are reconciled to them, indeed Allah is not (pleased with the transgressing people. (Tawba, ٩/٩۴-٩۶

In these verses, the Qur’an describes the situation of the hypocrites at the end of the battle of Tabuk, before the return of the Muslim army to Madina and makes the Prophet (S) aware that the hypocrites, who had not participated in the expedition to Tabuk, were planning to turn to the victorious army on their return to Madina, and present excuses to explain their own absence in the war. The verses make clear that their words were only lies and that they would even try to convince the soldiers and deceive the Muslims by swearing false oaths so that they may be not be taken to task .for the wrongful conduct that they were guilty of

The Qur’an also exposes their reasons for swearing these vain oaths and makes the Muslims aware of the facts so that they would be prepared beforehand to respond to the hypocrites and not be taken in by their deception and behave favourably with .them

Therefore, the Muslims were required to respond to the baseless words of the hypocrites by telling them flatly that would not accept their excuses or trust their words, because God, Who is aware of everyone’s manifest and

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hidden secrets, had informed them of their devilish plotting and the trap they had lain .to beguile the Muslims

The Qur’an is essentially telling the warriors that: “As soon as you return to them they will swear oaths by God that you should overlook their crime, but you should not (ignore the gravity of their actions because they are corrupt.” (Suratu Tawba, ٩/٩۶

At this point, two possibilities may be considered. The first is that the hypocrites had become aware of the revelation of the verses about them before the Prophet (S) returned to Madina. If this was the case, they would have certainly acted contrary to the revealed verses when they met the Muslims, i.e., they would have neither made any excuses nor sworn any oaths, thereby scoring a decisive propagandistic blow against the Qur’an, because they were ever-alert for any opportunity to weaken the Muslims. Why then did they not undermine the verses by acting contrary to them and

?instead do exactly as foretold by the Qur’an

The other possibility is that the hypocrites were unaware of the revelations of these verses and unknowingly made their excuses and took false oaths. In this case the verses of the Qur’an are a prediction which was completely accurate.

Therefore in both cases, the question remains that other than God, the Almighty – Who is aware of the secrets and inner thoughts of men – who else could have decisively foretold the aberrant actions of the hypocrites, and accurately announce their future words?

Undoubtedly this incident

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is a miracle of the Qur’an which has not been denied by any opponents of Islam.

(An Exposition of the Verse of Light (Ayat al-Nur

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِن شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونِةٍ لَّا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; a likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, (and) the glass is as it were a brightly shining star, lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not – light upon light – Allah guides to His light whom He pleases, and Allah sets forth parables for men, and Allah is Cognizant of all things. (al-Nur, ٢٤/٣٥)

Whenever there is a discussion about achieving a complete and comprehensive knowledge of God, the Sublime, we acknowledge that the human being will have to admit his incapacity and inadequacy to perceive that Exalted Reality, which is the only Reality in the realm of existence.

The limited reach of the human intellect is not powerful enough to make judgements

in the Divine sphere, or to unravel God's unfathomable secrets or to reach an understanding about such an Exalted Being, by study and deliberation. Even if man was to extend his imagination and thought to their limits or

to use his formidable powers of reason – which are able to reveal the mysteries of the entire natural world – to deliberate and consult with his fellows, he still would not have the requisite tools to reach his objective. It is for this reason that even the most elaborate explanations fall well short of describing His Being, because whatever man can understand from nature and science is created by God in the first place, and is a .product of His command and will

Our limited intellects are likewise quite unable to acquire a sound understanding of the nature of His attributes for the reason that when assigned to the Source of existence, attributes are quite different from when they are ascribed to other beings. And above all, they are concepts imagined and concocted by human minds, which are themselves prisoners of material boundaries, because all that which can be considered in the realms of human thought is characterized by limitations, and the reach and judgement of the intellect is likewise constrained and man's knowledge .despite his many advances is quite inadequate, while God is Infinite and Absolute

However, even as we acknowledge our inability and powerlessness to gain a perfect understanding and deep and expansive gnosis of the limitless Being, nevertheless we are able to achieve a degree of proximity and a relative understanding of His Exalted .station and tawhid

Even when man's intellect and thought are not yet fully developed to his highest potential, he is still able to use

his wondrous power of contemplation – which is a bounty derived from the command of that same limitless Source, which He has placed in our souls so that we might seek

a way to Him and to try to understand Him – and to use logic and rational proofs and acquire some understanding of that Eternal Being, in proportion to the extent of our individual insight and intellect. In this way, we may fully realize the existence of that constant Reality, Whose will is mirrored throughout the breadth of existence and .creation, behind everything that we observe

One of the most intricate verses of the Qur'an is the verse of light (ayat al-nur), which exegetes, mystics and philosophers have all discussed, and about which they have .offered opinions according to their respective inclinations

Undoubtedly, the most satisfying method of explaining unfamiliar phenomena is by the use of allegory, metaphor and simile; in truth this style of introduction and familiarization with truths, comprises of two important and basic aspects: the first is that the beauty and subtlety latent in the metaphor makes the heart of the listener incline to the object being described, and second, the intricate secrets and mysteries of the object may become better known to the listener through the aid of the metaphor and allegory that is employed. The verse above also falls under the category of allegory, however, only to the extent of the reach of the intellective faculty of man, and the insignificant knowledge that he possesses and

p: ۱۳۳

on the other hand, attempting to introduce the boundless and sacred existence of .God

It must not remain unsaid that even though in their commentaries of this verse, the great Muslim exegetes have not mentioned the main points that we will discuss later, nevertheless what they have presented about the concepts contained in the verse, and their discussions and expositions of its various aspects comprises of deep and subtle points that conform to the inner aspect of the Qur'an and based on the .perceptions of researchers they are coherent and plausible

However, the points that we will presently discuss may be classified as an alternate .possible explanation of the verse of the light

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

;Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth

That Sublime Existence who encompasses all the stations of perfection at once; His sacred Light embraces the entirety of existence and illuminates the heavens and the earth. He is the all-Knowing Creator whose eternal radiance infuses life in the creation and bestows assistance to them. He controls, nurtures and completes them through His power; the Light of His existence shines forth and is clearly manifest across the .expanse of existence

No corner of the cosmos can be conceived which the Light of His sacred Essence does not illuminate; however, each being prospers from this light according to its capacity and ability, ranging from the basic capacities to the vast benefits that man gathers for his own betterment and to reach the peaks of human perfection, which is the

.main objective of the Divine care

To prepare the minds of the listeners so that they understand the issue better, God :explains His light with the following simile

مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِی زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّیٌّ

A likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, (and) the ,glass is as it were a brightly shining star

The Qur’an which is the most fundamental source for acquiring the cognition of God and for deriving clear guidance about the path that humanity must traverse in order to reach the Originator of existence, compares the Divine light to the simplest object that guides man and illuminates his path in the depths of darkness: a lamp. The first question that arises here is that, why did God not compare His light to the most brilliant and luminous object in the world, that is, the sun, which besides its grandeur and radiance, produces many effects and benefits for the inhabitants of the earth?

?Why has the Light of God been compared to a man-made lamp instead

:It must be stated in reply that

Firstly, the sun, with all its illumination, benefits and effects on living beings is still only one of the creations of God in the system of the universe; it is merely carrying out the task it was designed for. If God compared His light with that of the sun, it would indicate a diminution from the state of the Creator to the

level of the created, and this is contrary to the exalted nature of God, whose Power extends over all His creation; an ordinary believer when walking through nature and pondering over these same celestial phenomena and the objective behind their .creation will be able to acknowledge and infer His existence

Secondly, a believer, an unbeliever and every human being, irrespective of his beliefs and convictions, seeks and receives the same benefit from the sun, while the brilliant Light of God only illuminates the pages of the hearts of the believers, and His eternal radiance polishes the minds and beings of the people of cognition and bestows upon them hope and mercy, which are the sources of contentment for the soul; He does not extend the same bounty to the hearts of the unbelievers, who are imprisoned by .their veils of darkness

Now why has the Light of God been compared to a lamp, despite it being an object designed by man, and moreover, its light can only illuminate a very limited area – ?while the light of the sun illuminates and shines over a large expanse of the earth

The reply is as follows: All the characteristics of the lamp that have been mentioned in the verse have neither been manufactured by God so that it is a creation of the Creator, nor do they quite resemble a similar man-made device, because the brightness of this radiant lamp and its unique qualities which cannot be found in the expanse of existence, has been

.taken as the basis of the similitude

:The similitude of God’s light to that of a lamp

مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ

A likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp can be studied from this .perspective

If a person wants to travel a certain distance in pitch darkness, he must first procure a lamp so that he can illuminate the path ahead of him and through the aid of the light he may not lose his way and thus reach his destination safely. It would be insensible and ill-advised to set off on a journey in total darkness and travel across hills and .valleys and still consider oneself needless of a light by which to illuminate the way

In order to travel on the path of truth and to avoid the darkness of the heart and mind and to finally be protected from going astray, one needs another light, and that is the .guidance that illuminates the path of useful thought and discovering the truth

If man is intent on seeking salvation, he must make himself concordant with the constant journeying of creation and people who are travelling in anticipation of the inevitable meeting with the Lord (liqa’ Allah), so that he may one day reach the exalted vicinity of God and set foot on the Divine threshold; this means attaining every peak of his potential and it cannot be achieved except by travelling with the aid .of Divine illumination towards his infinite Essence

Now, what could the glass that

p: ١٣٧

encloses and protects the lamp, as mentioned in the verse, possibly denote? The function of the glass is to shield the light from being extinguished by the forces of winds and storms; the persistence, survival and luminance of the light depend upon .the glass and its continual presence as a protective device against the elements

Just as the continuation of the light is linked to the presence of the glass, which acts

as a protective barrier, the Light of God is similarly continually dependent on His eternal Existence. Since this light originates from His Sacred Essence, which abides forever, and is not subject to any change, its illumination also is linked to the infinite and subsists eternally. Thus, His Essence infuses the universe with life, while His Light .(illuminates it (with guidance

Thereafter, the verse talks of the transparency of the protective glass which projects the light forth like a sparkling star, because the transparent glass does not inhibit the transmission of the light in the least; but at the same time, the presence of the glass forms a barrier that will prevent man from accessing the source of the light. It is possible that the brilliant protective barrier that projects the light is an allusion to the .(high ranking angels and the bearers of God's throne ('arsh

:The Qur'an states

الَّذِينَ يَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ

Those who bear the power and those around Him celebrate the praise of their Lord ((al-Ghafir, ۴۰/۶

And at the same time the existence of the

p: ۱۳۸

:angels themselves is full of radiance

كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ

(As if it were a brightly shining star, (al-Nur, ۲۴/۳۵

When we consider the bearers of the throne as a similitude to the glass that encloses the light, we reach the conclusion that in this metaphor, because the glass acts a barrier preventing man from gaining access to the source of the illumination, the angels are also located in four walls forming an impenetrable barrier. Man, who is a material being, cannot penetrate into the realm of immaterial beings like the angels, never mind the Source of the Divine light itself, the profoundness of whose Essence is

.beyond all comprehension, thought and sensation

The Commander of the Faithful, Ali (A) declares in this regard: “[Praise be to Him (Whom]...the flights of intellect cannot reach” (wa la yanaluhu ghaws al-fitan).(١)

According to the foregoing, the idea of the glass that enclosed the light is to radiate the light for the benefit of man. The bearers of the throne (‘arsh) and those that inhabit the Divine threshold similarly are conduits through which the Divine effusion .and grace flows from His sacred Essence towards mankind

Furthermore, just as people benefit from the light of a lamp that is situated next to them, God too is close to man, not just beside him but closer to him than his life-vein :((jugular

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

And certainly We created man, and We know what his mind suggests to him, and We are

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Nahj al-Balagha, sermon ١ -١

(nearer to him than his life-vein (Qaf, ٥٠/١۶

We also observe plainly that the closer a light is to a person, the more he is able to benefit from its luminance; now since God, the Exalted, is closer to the human being than every other source of illumination – closer to him than even than his own jugular vein – His radiant Light transports hearts and minds to the realms of enlightenment .and cognition, allowing man to observe many truths

In this lamp, there is oil that has been derived from the bounteous olive tree, which possesses the exclusive quality that it is not situated at the “east or west” of the orchard. Perhaps this phrase has been used to indicate the fact that since the east is the location of sunrise and the west is the location of the sunset, when the verse

states that it is “not eastern”, it means to imply that the illumination of that Infinite being is not one that rises, or in other words, has a point of origination. Similarly it is “not western”, meaning that it is not an illumination that ever wanes, or in other words, it has no point of termination either. It is eternal. Just as the Creator of the universe subsists eternally, so does the illumination that perpetually flows from the .Infinite Source

Even though the apparent attribution of the description, “neither eastern nor western” seems to be directed at the olive tree, the particular and special implications of the phrase employed

p: ۱۴۰

.can be used to further explain the illumination of the immaculate Essence of God

Some exegetes have suggested that the phrase, “neither eastern nor western” has been used to denote that the light of God illuminates the east and west of the world. This view does not apparently conform to the latent meaning of the verse, because the question arises, “if it means the east and west of the world, then what about the ”?north and south and other areas

While we know that the illumination of the Reality that has been present in every epoch and in every land encompasses every part in existence. The radiance of His light continually illuminates each atom in the cosmos; therefore, the intended meaning of God’s words here is not a geographical reference, because His exalted .existence is free from such constraints

يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ

(The oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not (al-Nur, ۲۴/۳۵

Every light that exists in the universe has the feature that in order to become luminous, it requires a spark to initially set it alight and work its effect. The factor that sets it alight has a fundamental role; however the Light of God is the exception. His Light is independent of every factor from the view that light only originates from His

Sacred Essence, and this is a unique because His attributes, particulars and distinctions are contained within Himself and no excellence can be imagined to be other than a Perfect Existence; in other

p: ۱۴۱

.words, His Light is not other than His Essence

نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ

(Light upon light (al-Nur, ۲۴/۳۵

It is correct that His Light is Absolute and no limit or boundary exists for it; however in the stages of exposure, its manifestation is relative to the capacities and merits of the recipients. As man ascends to higher and higher levels of recognition in tawhid, he :likewise benefits from further illumination in his spiritual course

This part of the verse is also an analogy for this very meaning because after bestowing the gift of life, God guides His deserving creatures towards the perfection of their potentials by granting them of other bounties and makes them the recipients .of His guidance

That which leads man to ultimate contentment and felicity is his sincere struggle to utilize his latent talents and abilities to benefit from the guidance and Light of His liberal and beneficent Creator, because all the paths to prosperity and salvation end :there. In the supplication of sahar, we recite

اللهما انی أسئلک من نورک بأنورها و کل نورک نیّر اللهما انی أسئلک بنورک کله

O Lord, We ask you from You of Your most illuminating Light, and all Your Lights are " ".illuminating; O Allah I ask You by all your Light

After discussing the matters raised above, we should also think about the end of the :verse

وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

(And God sets forth parables for men, and Allah is Cognizant of all things. (al-Nur, ۲۴/۳۵

.And Allah knows best

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About center

In the name of Allah

هَلْيَسْتَوِيالَّذِينَيَعْلَمُونَوَالَّذِينَلَايَعْلَمُونَ
?Are those who know equal to those who do not know
al-Zumar: ۹

:Introduction
Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan, from ۲۰۰۷, under the authority of Ayatollah Haj SayyedHasanFaqihImami (God blesses his soul), by sincere and daily efforts of university and seminary elites and sophisticated groups began its activities .in religious, cultural and scientific fields

:Manifesto
Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan in order to facilitate and accelerate the accessibility of researchers to the books and tools of research, in the field of Islamic science, and regarding the multiplicity and dispersion of active centers in this field
and numerous and inaccessible sources by a mere scientific intention and far from any kind of social, political, tribal and personal prejudices and currents, based on performing a project in the shape of (management of produced and published works from all Shia centers) tries to provide a rich and free collection of books and research papers for the experts, and helpful contents and discussions for the educated generation and all classes of people interested in reading, with various formats in the .cyberspace
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:Appreciation

We would appreciate the centers, institutes, publications, authors and all honorable .friends who contributed their help and data to us to reach the holy goal we follow

:Address of the central office

Isfahan, Abdorazaq St, Haj Mohammad JafarAbadei Alley, Shahid Mohammad HasanTavakkoly Alley, Number plate ۱۲۹, first floor

Website: www.ghbook.ir

Email: Info@ghbook.ir

Central office Tel: ۰۹۱۳۲۰۰۰۱۰۹

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